

JENNY SAVILLE
GAZE

Exhibition Facts

Duration	21 March – 29 June 2025
Opening	20 March 2025 6.30 pm
Venue	Column Hall The ALBERTINA Museum
Curators	Angela Stief and Melissa Lumbroso
Works	26
Catalogue	Available for EUR 29,90 (English & German) on-site at the museum Shop as well as via https://shop.albertina.at/en/
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Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Except Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
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Jenny Saville

Gaze

21 March until 29 June 2025

The renowned English artist Jenny Saville (born 1970) has been exploring the tradition of body paintings in her oeuvre for more than three decades, with her figures occupying a position between idealization and deconstruction. She draws inspiration from art history to create painting that is characterized by corporeality, carnality and the interplay of new and old media. Saville is one of the most important representatives of the Young British Artists and was the only figurative painter to take part in the legendary exhibition *Sensation* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1997.

Self-evident: Six solo exhibitions of women artists at the ALBERTINA Museum

“This year, the Albertina Museum is dedicating a total of six solo exhibitions to women. It starts with the solo show by Jenny Saville, which is also being shown in a museum exhibition for the first time in Austria and Germany. The artist offers a new perspective on the human body, drawing inspiration from old masters such as Leonardo and Titian, but also from modern greats such as Schiele, Bacon and Lucian Freud: This makes her a particularly good fit for the ALBERTINA Museum's exhibition program, which houses collections spanning more than six centuries of art history,” says Ralph Gleis, Director General of the Albertina Museum.

“Saville translates the techniques of the old masters into an original, contemporary approach that oscillates between figuration and abstraction. She develops her figurative depictions, like a sculptor, mostly from abstract color fields and thick layers of paint that gradually take shape. Ancient or Christian iconographies serve as a model for her artistic exploration,” says curator and Albertina Modern director Angela Stief.

Saville's work interweaves painting and drawing and explores the aesthetic potential of the graphic and painterly: She paints huge paper works with color, and canvases are in turn worked on with chalk and charcoal. Since the 1990s, she has been creating figurative depictions with an accentuated, explicit physicality, characterized by directness and immediacy, including extreme views of the body. In addition to the large figures and nudes in classical poses – standing, reclining, sitting and their contemporary variations – the artist devotes herself above all to portraits and self-portraits. Whether she is depicting history, the bodies of others or herself, her work is always characterized by the fact that it defies conventional notions of beauty and ugliness. She succeeds in formulating an existential claim in her art that deals with the question of what it means to be human.

The ALBERTINA Museum is now organizing the first solo exhibition of the well-known British artist in Austria, providing a retrospective insight into her artistic developments over the last two decades. In addition, the show in the historic Column Hall also presents four new, never-before-exhibited works from the 26 works on display.

Exhibition Texts

INTRO

Renowned British artist Jenny Saville (b. 1970) is deeply connected to the traditions and history of painting. She was the only figurative painter represented in the show *Sensation* in London in 1997 and was initially associated with the Young British Artists through a group of exhibitions. For over three decades, Saville has engaged with the centuries-old tradition of representing the human form, with a particular emphasis on the female nude and portraiture. At the core of her artistic practice, which oscillates between figuration and abstraction, are the traditions of the craft of painting. Saville is indebted to the techniques of the old masters, from Leonardo da Vinci and Titian through Egon Schiele, Pablo Picasso, and Willem de Kooning to Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud. This generative process of art historical exchange, a dialogue across time, is foundational for a profoundly original painter who is unmatched in her ability to render the zeitgeist on paper and canvas.

Saville shapes her depictions like a sculptor, with a distinct physicality emerging from abstract passages of color, from thin watercolor stains through to impasto layers of paint, exploring the potentials of what paint can do as a medium. Ancient and Christian iconographies are referenced in her work for her explorations of space, figures, and surfaces. The result is a visual language strongly rooted in historical tradition yet reimagined for the present day.

Jenny Saville continually fathoms the aesthetic potential of both graphic and painterly qualities. She paints not only on canvas, but also on large sheets of paper. Conversely, she uses watercolor, charcoal, and pastel on raw canvas, as well as on paper. Whether representing history, bodies, or portraits, Saville explores notions of beauty and has developed a painterliness that looks to what it means to be human.

THE FATES

The works *Fates 1–3* refer to the trio of ancient goddesses—one weaves life's thread, another measures its length, and a third cuts it. Saville has always been interested in the traditions of the classical world and how these have traveled and shifted through our shared histories to offer explorations of the mysteries of nature and fertility. The artist paints the Fates on sculptural plinths, using a low-to-high perspective. This viewpoint simultaneously offers grandeur and intimacy, forging a relationship to classical sculpture and creating a strong visual dynamic. This is an unusual and experimental group of paintings in Saville's oeuvre, as she typically paints more naturalist figures. These paintings have been composed by collaging painterly elements, merging figurative bodies, abstraction and sculpture. They are inspired by Picasso's constructed women of the early twentieth century, such as his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

GAZE

Jenny Saville's portrait *Gaze* is dominated by blue eyes and a penetrating stare—a look she embodies with empathy and innocence. Areas of the painting have abstract passages that are united by broad brushstrokes and an impasto, fleshy surface, enhancing the humanity of the sitter. As is so often the case, the artist's larger-than-life representations of the human head allow the painting to be experienced on many levels: From a distance, the painting is a traditional portrait, and as one approaches the painterly surface, the interweaving of the paint marks and color envelops the viewer to give a heightened sense of realism, to experience the joy of paint in itself. Saville has always held a fascination for Rembrandt's and Titian's portraiture and how they use impasto to imbue their portraits with humanity.

CIRCE II

The traditions and craft of painting are at the heart of Saville's work. Her large-scale portraiture offers the possibility to use paint in all its forms. The eyes, the look, and the humanity of the sitter are key to her portraits. This model, with her long classical neck and strong facial structure, has appeared in several paintings in recent years. Saville has periodically painted two heads together at a pivot expanding the portrait's landscape and emphasizing the character of the head more fully. A rich red

background painted over gold reflects Saville's research into icons and the mysterious awe that gold offers. Flickers of gold and blue are infused with red, juxtaposed with the fleshy, painterly movement in the model's face. Saville's joy in painting is evident in how she constructs the head, running colors into each other to create a sense of reflected light at the side of the heads—a technique developed by looking at abstract painters like de Kooning and Cy Twombly.

SONG OF SONGS

In *Song of Songs*, Saville interweaves multiple viewpoints of a loving couple, moving between abstract passages and particular bodies. This painting is composed of various perspectives or scenes, like the poetic lines from which the title of the painting is taken. Saville depicts types of faith—faith in love and her faith in the act of painting itself. She references artists of the past like Matisse and especially the female figures in Titian's paintings of Danaë. *Song of Songs* reveals and conceals the intimacy of a couple and there is a deliberate restraint in not showing all of the couple's bodies at the same time. A female breast is reflected in the distant mirror and the strong colored abstract paint can be seen behind the rectangular panel: All these elements ultimately create a sense of wholeness and the painterly embodiment of a loving union.

SKENE

Reclining nudes, reminiscent of Danaë by Titian, Rembrandt, and Klimt, are juxtaposed with quadrangular panels positioned parallel to or out of perspective with the picture plane, revealing the "inside" of the painting. Intimate moments like the holding of hands are shown in small panels within the composition. Similar to Francis Bacon's use of circular shapes to bring figurative elements into focus, Saville employs a range of techniques to examine how we experience reality in the twenty-first century. Fascinated by how we live both authentic human and "screen" realities, through telephones and computers, Saville develops pictorial forms to explore these simultaneous realities. In both *Skene* and *Ekkyklema*—whose titles refer to stage elements of Greek tragedy—the bodies convey both movement through the mark-making and a stillness through the classicism of the horizontal box structure on which the figures are placed.

BYZANTIUM

The harmonious triangular arrangement in *Byzantium* combines influences from various cultural spheres—from Byzantine Orthodox icons to Christian iconography of the Pietà and medieval devotional images. The use of gold and the stenciled shapes and particularly the form of the main figure's head hark back to religious icons. Saville's technique was developed from studying the craft of traditional icon painting using a russet *bole* beneath the gold. The multiple legs and feet that the artist has built up on the right side of the painting hint to the multitude of images that has been created of this subject throughout history: The mother-and-child motif holds timeless qualities of devotion and universal love from across the ages.

EXODUS

Exodus combines the Western theme of the Pietà with the now ubiquitous press images of injured figures being rescued from the rubble of war and disaster. At the center of this work on paper, Saville places the portrait of a child's head with eyes closed. Other portraits of victims with limp or dangling limbs are grouped around a figure saving from human suffering. While the title, *Exodus*, evokes the departure from Egypt in the Old Testament, the work retains contemporary relevance alluding to the ongoing human tragedies around the globe, where history seems to repeat itself. Although Saville is not an explicitly political artist, this deeply humanitarian work calls for greater empathy and compassion for the lives of children who are most often the innocent victims of war, regardless of race or religion.

Press Images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at.
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Jenny Saville
Byzantium, 2018
Oil on canvas
194,3 × 239,1 cm
The George Economou Collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Mike Bruce. Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Fate I, 2018
Oil on canvas
260,4 × 240 cm
The Nixon Collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Mike Bruce. Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Song of Songs, 2020–2023
Oil and oil bar on linen
180 × 240 cm
Fredriksen Family Art Collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Gaze, 2021–2024
Oil and acrylic on linen
200 × 160 cm
Private collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Transvestite Paint Study, 2003–2004
Oil and charcoal on paper
152 × 122 cm
Private collection, England
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Chapter (for Linda Nochlin), 2016–2018
Charcoal on cotton duck canvas
260,4 × 236,2 cm
Private collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Rob McKeever / Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Exodus, 2020–2021
Charcoal and pastel on paper
110 × 75 cm
Lewis Collection
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Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd / Courtesy Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Untitled (Paint Study), 2003–2004
Oil on watercolor paper
152 × 121,5 cm
Private collection
© Jenny Saville / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Gagosian



Jenny Saville
Skene, 2023
Oil, charcoal, and pastel on linen
120 × 150 cm
The Nixon Collection
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Photo: Lucy Dawkins / Courtesy Gagosian