

# A Photographic Portrayal of Eight Artists Shaping The Future of Figurative Art

Author - Jean Wainwright.

Curated and photographed exclusively for The FLUX Review by Daniele Mah.

Figurative painting is beguiling; we don't just register the marks made by the artist, the composition, the individual style, paint rendered in gestural arabesques, feathered or stippled, in thick impasto or thin layers: We see historical context, symbolism or allegory, myths and topical narratives; colour with its seductive role, each stroke of the brush loaded with potential energy, an aesthetic decision swept into chromatic form and contour. In front of an artist's work, we can experience a multiplicity of readings and reactions culled from our own sensibilities, cultural references, knowledge and experience.

In the last 10 years, both women artists and figurative art have become increasingly visible, never more than now. From important historical figures such as the 17th-century artist Artemisia Gentileschi to Alice Neel, Chantal Joffe, Marlene Dumas, Cecily Brown, Faith Ringgold, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and Caroline Coon to name a few. Women artists past and present are being reassessed, re-evaluated and lauded. Figurative painting has been particularly visible in salerooms, art fairs and galleries, in major museum exhibitions and retrospectives. The historical setbacks that women artists faced are being highlighted in critical debate, whether from cultural bias, with its hierarchy of subject matter, bearing major responsibilities for parenting or being undervalued and overshadowed. The subject matter and topics addressed by women artists reveal a diverse and exuberant synergy with the topics of the 21st century. In our world of screens, it seems there is a leaning towards the return of the 'hand'. We, it appears, want to look at people, look at figures, identify and recognise ourselves. Frances Borzello, in *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self Portraits*, claims that self-portraits are not 'innocent reflections of what artists see when they look in the mirror' but rather part of a language that painters use to make a point from the simple 'this is what I look like' to the more complicated 'this is what I believe in'.

Daniele Mah's photographs of women artists portrayed with their work has its roots in historical photographic portraiture. Her many references include Dora Maar and Man Ray as well as Angus McBean with his surrealist leanings. Her inquisitive mind and many references from both artists and photographers from the past to the present day have left her with an enduring fascination for innovative portraiture. For her, beyond the process itself, the technical expertise of framing and lighting her subject is the rapport, sensitivity and personal connection she has with her sitters, the vital umbilical that draws her to the genre. Working alone with no assistants, she explains that there is often a 'sense of awkwardness when people are placed in front of the camera' which she tries to dispel 'by using humour to defuse any tension and the inevitable female connection'. It's a strategy which helps the artistic symbiosis between her subject, herself and her camera lens.

Many of Mah's past assignments as a professional portrait photographer have been for high-profile newspapers and magazines. Varied and engaging as they are, this series is different. It is her personal conception and an ongoing project that started five years ago during conversations with the art critic Edward Lucie-Smith. As a portrait photographer, and with her deep passion for art and photography, she found herself naturally drawn to figurative art. Her resulting photographs, with their artistic references, have been exhibited in several exhibitions. Her continuing interest in the subject matter of female figurative artists led to her compiling notes and sketches utilised to visualise the compositions and scenarios in advance of her sittings. Using a medium format camera as her tool, her powerfully interpretive vision creates a synergy between her ideas and impressions, the sitters and their art.

Mah captured Amy Beager's portrait by first depicting her kneeling in front of her canvas *Romeo and Juliet*, her calm stillness contrasting with the dramatic arc of the lovers' tragedy. In Mah's second double-exposure portrait of Beager, there is a photographic metamorphosis as shiny crows' wings, which Mah had in her house, become a device to partially obscure Beager's face, alluding to Greek mythology and angels' wings, which frequently appear in her paintings.

In contrast, Ania Hobson's portrait is shot against white curtains transformed with a red gel; the artist appears as an actor on her own stage. In the second portrait imposed against the backdrop of the artist's canvas, *Two Moods*, with stylised hair whipped by the wind, Hobson is captured by Mah's lens at the very moment of flinging her hair up and back; the tension in her face from the act carefully controlled as she stares serenely out at us, the painted hand around her waist anchoring her to her own painting.



Freya Douglas-Morris' paintings suggested to Mah yet another scenario, a contemplative symbolic mirroring. Her reclining self-portrait in paint transposed to photography, the empty book in the painting now becoming the artist's favourite book on Matisse. The undulating rhythm of *September Shadows* and quiet, contemplative moment is also echoed in the second portrait, where the artist, her dress and face seem to be literally part of the canvas. Quiet, contemplative and subtle, you seem to drift with Douglas-Morris' gaze as she appears lost in the middle distance of her imagination.

Gill Button's work, *Deserves A Quiet Night*, is also evocatively translated by Mah into a contemplative portrait. Once again, our gaze is cleverly directed out of the window as if dreaming of Button's 'nocturne' reflected in the glass, we are in her space. In Mah's second portrait, Button pauses, glasses pushed back on her head, as if contemplating a work we cannot see. Nothing is accidental, a vase of tulips a symbol of love, the cup and iPhone, the pose capturing that 'in-between' moment both evocative and compelling,

Mah's portrait of Sara Berman's is in comparison playfully performative, in a doubling of hands, arms, legs and shadows, dynamically in action. She 'kicks' her canvas *Freefall* out of the way. Her layered portrait was for Mah a 'lucky compositional gift' as there was an empty place on her canvas where Mah could insert Berman's portrait superimposed on her 'multiple self-portraits and personalities' and bond them creatively together.

At times Mah seems to mine her repository of historic images: Sikelela Owen becomes a Renaissance Madonna, the light glazes of the artist's brushwork evoked by Mah's double exposure. Similarly, in her white wedding dress, Owen is placed against her canvas depicting her family with their faces obscured with paint; Owen smiles, her gaze directed beyond us, her past, present and future enigmatically and joyfully locked into the portrait.

The British Iranian artist Soheila Sokhanvari is also portrayed in a more traditional pose in Mah's portrait. In front of a Swiss cheese plant, and centrally placed, Sokhanvari stares straight into our eyes with an unflinching gaze. In the layering of the image, she is transported into her painting, the lush foliage and leopard recalling both landscapes of the imagination and reality, which we, the viewer, are left to complete.

Finally, Mah's portrait of Caroline Coon portrays her as a fearless and outspoken campaigner and also an artist. Her vibrancy and energy are palpable in the portrait. It seems fitting that Coon has placed herself on Robert Rosenblum's *Paintings of the Musée d'Orsay*, home of Edouard Manet's notorious *Olympia*, and fearlessly next to a skull and lilies. Her strong gaze and powerful presence a reminder of her unflinching and uncompromising work. The references to the 'vanitas' remain a reminder of the inevitability of death and the endurance of art.



# Freya Douglas-Morris

Freya Douglas-Morris studied Fine Art at Brighton University before receiving an MA from the Royal College of Art in 2013. With solo shows in London and Milan, she has also exhibited in the US, China, Italy, France, Austria and the UK. Upon graduating from the RCA she was selected for the Bloomberg New Contemporaries, The New Sensations and The Catlin Guide. She has work featured in the publications 100 Painters of Tomorrow and Paper – Saatchi Gallery. She lives and works in London. For more information visit: [freya douglas-morris.com](http://freya douglas-morris.com)



White Lake © Freya Douglas-Morris

## Describe your work in 10 words?

Rich colour, poetic space, narratives of love, family, travel, dreams.

## How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

I think I am still discovering my style. It is a process that I hope never ends, a questioning and seeking, a pushing and pulling to try new things within the work, imagery and process. Yet the atmosphere of the landscapes, the feel of the spaces, the language of the figures, these come very innately and feel very natural. I've noticed that the more I let myself give in to the feeling I wish to convey in the painting without over thinking it, the more natural and fluid the work becomes.





**Can you remember a first visual or art work that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it and when did that happen?**

I have wanted to be a painter all my life. I remember making a drawing of a swimmer with crayons as a small child and handing it to my parents, telling them I wanted to be a painter when I grew up (with the amazing confidence and certainty that a child has when they say these things). Yet there were definitely specific artworks around the house when I was a child which I found inspiring and magical and which I am sure helped inspire this choice. One was a giant poster of Hockney's Harlequin from Parade he made for the Met Opera in 1981. I had it hanging on my bedroom wall by the door. At night the light in the hallway would light it up in this dramatic fashion. It's quite a strange painting for a child, the man has a mask on revealing only one little white eye, he has a red face and hands, funny little white shoes and he is wearing a full body suit. And he is upside down. And the room he is in, which must be a stage set, also defies gravity with a ladder floating in space, shapes hanging in the night. I used to stare at it for hours wondering what the man was thinking, where was he going, who was he and where was he? I loved all these unanswered questions and in many ways the work I make now also prompts similar questions: where are we, what era are we in, what is the relationship between the figures and what is the lone figure thinking about? A painting that asks a question is always alive.

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

I think at times I used to find having so much time alone in a studio difficult. I love being in a room by myself, I need quiet to think and try to create the right atmosphere to work in, to mentally step into the mind-set I need to make the paintings. But at times I think it can be a lonely experience for many, especially in the winter. However now I am a mum to a baby and toddler I find the peaceful time in the studio really valuable!

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22?**

Currently my main focus is the two solo shows I have coming up this year. One at Lychee One, London and one at Arusha, Edinburgh, both hopefully should be able to be visited in person, which will be amazing if that can happen.



September Shadows © Freya Douglas-Morris



All Paths Lead Somewhere © Freya Douglas-Morris





# Soheila Sokhanvari

Soheila Sokhanvari is a British/Iranian artist whose multimedia work cultivates a non-uniform practice, and her works deal with the contemporary political landscape with a focus on pre-revolutionary Iran of 1979. Her miniature paintings employ the traditional egg tempera technique on calf vellum by grinding colour pigments, so, in effect, they are comparable to modern illuminations.

She is interested in the practice of magic realism, symbolism and allegory which allows political and social commentary through poetry, metaphor and subtext. Magic realism is the most useful tool which allows slippage in meaning which resists the totalitarian discourse of all kind. In her paintings and drawings, employing calf vellum functions as a symbolic gesture; calf representing the animal that is sacrificed in all monotheistic religions becomes the symbol of the sacrifice of the individual and the artist.

Her practice also includes crude oil paintings and the use of found objects, from taxidermy to genuine, expired passports. The concept of political, social and the individual remains the core of her concern and addresses our collective traumas and consciousness. For more info, visit: [soheila-sokhanvari.com](http://soheila-sokhanvari.com)



Bang (Portrait of Faranak) © Soheila Sokhanvari



Hey, Baby I'm a Star (Portrait of Forouzan) © Soheila Sokhanvari

**Describe your work in 10 words?**

Interested in events and people from pre-revolutionary Iran, focusing on women.

**How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?**

I think style is like handwriting; it is not a conscious decision, so it is definitely not forced. I think drawing and painting provokes a mysterious force that I do not understand; it is like a demon possession that compels me to make art.





**Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?**

I was 15 when I went on a school trip to the National Gallery, London. It was the first time I had visited an art museum in my life, as there were no art galleries in my city of birth, Shiraz. When I walked through the NG spaces and saw the paintings I had seen in books, it made me so emotional. We had a museum guide explaining some of the works, and the first painting that we spent time with was the Arnolfini Portrait by Jan van Eyck, followed by the works of Rembrandt and Rubens. I remember having to stifle my tears so as not to be seen by my contemporaries crying over paintings; teenagers can be so cruel. Like many children, I enjoyed making art. I do not think I have ever stopped, even when I became a research scientist. At school, the only option of continuing in arts was to become an art teacher. Therefore, the desire to be an artist was not a result of a gallery visit as I had wanted to be an artist from an early age but did not have the means or the know-how to become one.

Dark Horse @ Soheila Sokhanvari



**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

I was a scientist working for Cambridge University when I decided to study art. The most challenging thing for me was negotiating all the responsibilities that come with being an adult in a financially equal relationship and resigning from a well-paid job, going back to square one, and studying for a career with no security. Sometimes it is easier to make life-changing decisions when you are not married.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

2021 started with my participation in the National Gallery Victoria Triennial in Melbourne, Australia, which finished in April. I am presently working towards a solo show at a major art gallery / museum in London in October 2022. The show will be announced later, but with COVID lockdowns, it is possible it will be delayed until spring 2023. Also, as my paintings take so long to make, I have decided to have only one other solo show, in early 2022, at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London.

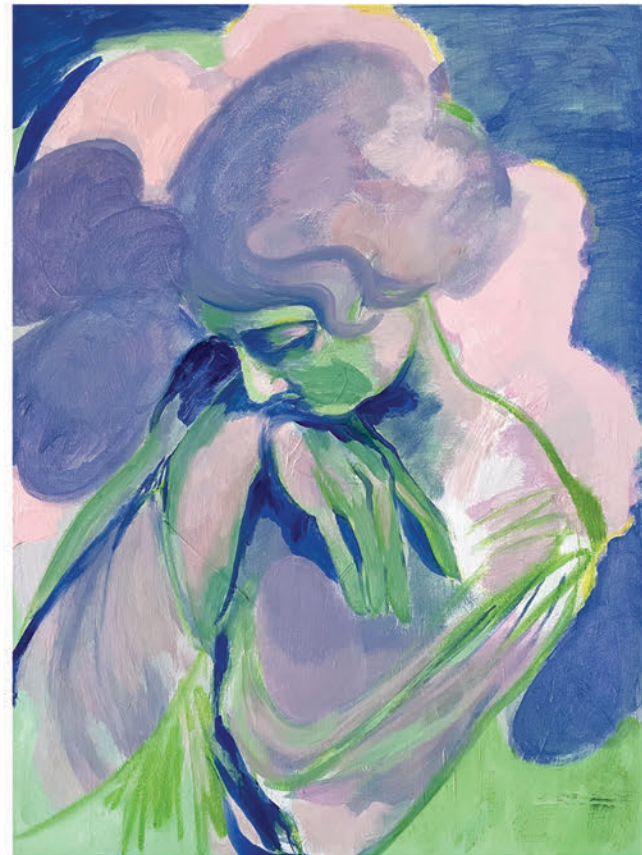


# Amy Beager

Amy Beager lives and works from her studio in Chelmsford, UK. She obtained a National Diploma in Art & Design (Distinction) in 2007 and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Nottingham Trent University in 2010. Beager was selected as a winner for the Delphain Gallery open call 2020 and started exhibiting her work in London in 2019. Her painting The Blue Room has recently been on display at Saatchi Gallery as part of the group exhibition Antisocial Isolation curated by Delphian Gallery. Beager's work has been acquired by Soho House and placed in multiple private collections globally. For more info, visit: amybeager.com



R + J © Amy Beager



Eggshell © Amy Beager

## Describe your work in 10 words?

Bold, dramatic, expressive, classical figures re-imagined into modern-day deities.

## How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

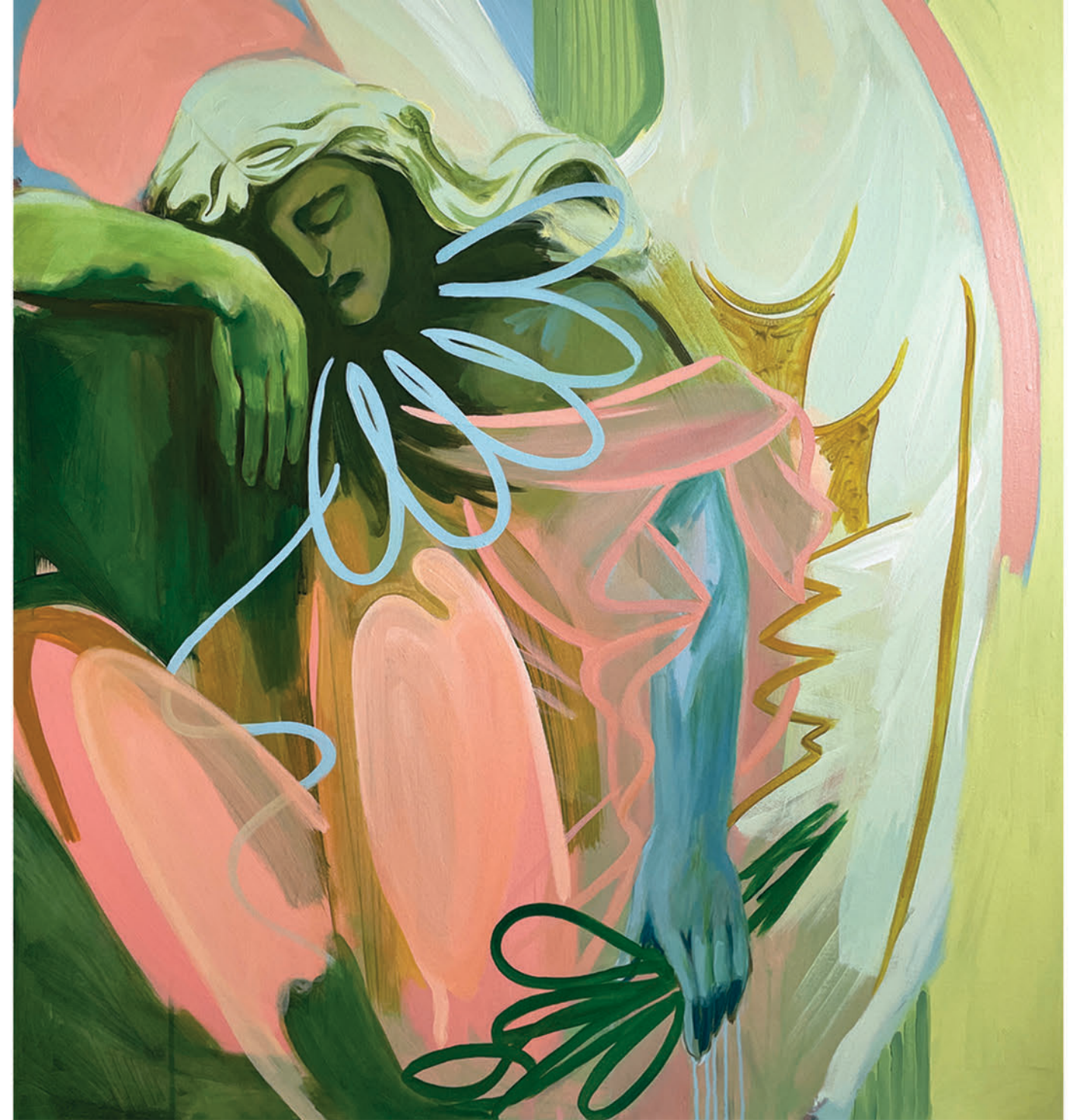
My style comes from a combination of innate visual handwriting and experimentation, which has developed naturally throughout my practice and experiences – using a pattern of subconscious habits, actions and characteristics during the painting process, alongside conscious and experimental ones. It has been a gradual process since my BA in Fashion Design, where I learnt to develop my own drawing style of quick suggestive fashion illustrations. I made detailed spec drawings of clothing and worked with colour and texture during my womenswear design career.

## Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?

I visited the Saatchi Gallery during my Art A-levels in 2005 - The Triumph of Painting exhibition. This is where I first saw paintings face-to-face that confirmed my desire to be an artist. I was mesmerised by Peter Doig's Canoe-Lake. The swampy green figure lurking in the canoe and the cabin hidden among the trees were unsettling perfection. Also, Marlene Dumas' Feather Stola and Julie-Die Vrou. I bought the exhibition book and still look through it regularly.







The Sun, For Sorrow, Will Not Show His Head © Amy Beager

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

The most difficult part of being an artist for me has been, and still is, learning to talk about my work. It is a difficult thing to do, especially when you are a more visual person and possibly because I haven't done a Fine Art degree. I hadn't received any real critical feedback or even heard others talk in-depth about art or their own artwork. To help with this, I have been listening to lots of podcasts of artist/gallerist interviews and exhibition reviews. I am also currently on the Turps Banana Correspondence Course. Through a number of reviews I submit images of works and receive critical essays back from an online mentor.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

Group Exhibition with Four You Gallery and Artistellar in June 2021  
Artist Residency at 'Clovermill' in The Netherlands in August 2021  
Group Exhibition with Liliya Art Gallery in August/September 2021  
Solo Exhibition with Wilder Gallery in October/November 2021

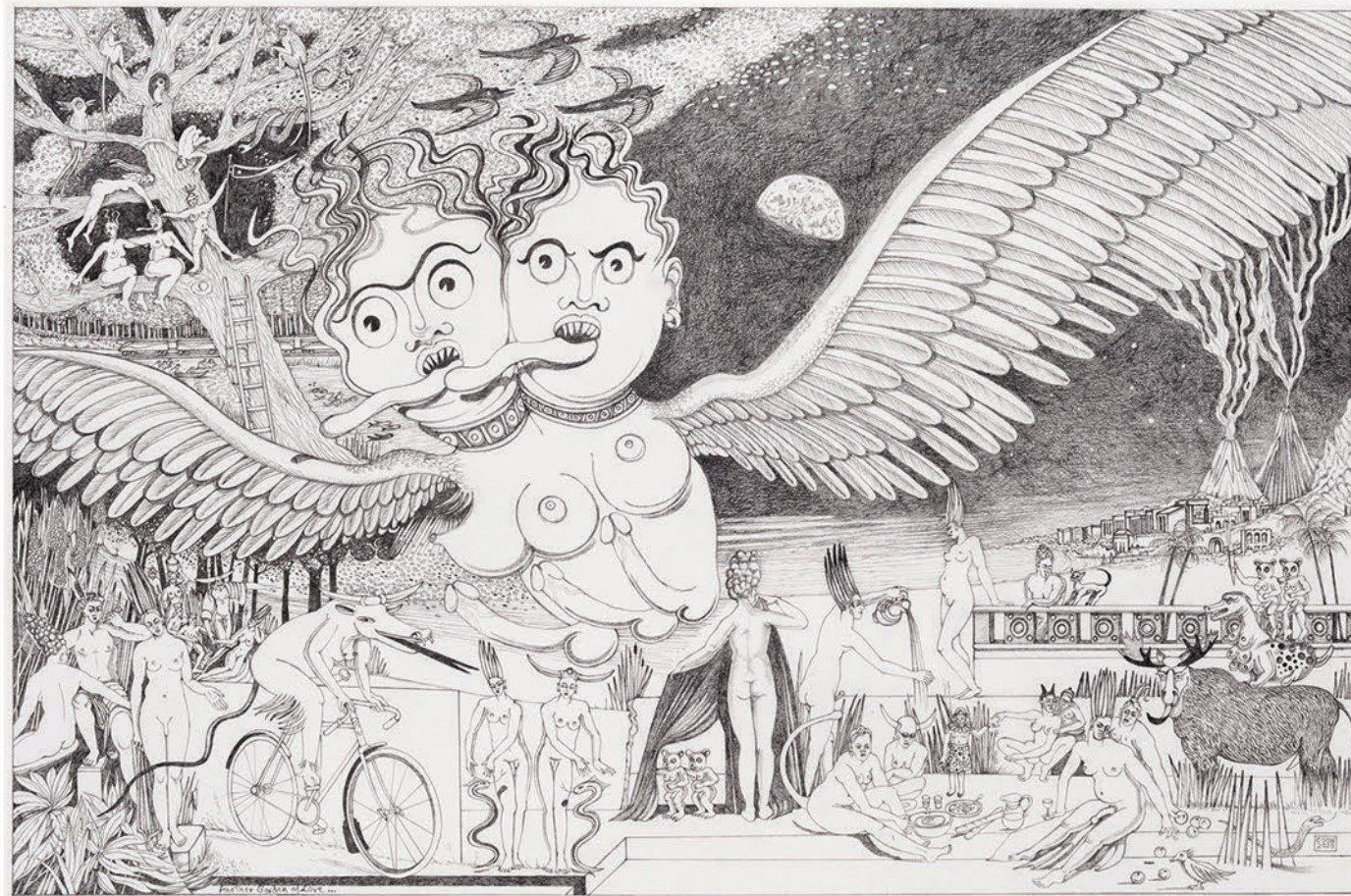


# Caroline Coon

Caroline Coon is an artist, activist, journalist and photographer who has had an incredible career over the past six decades. Coon was involved in the London punk scene, writing about bands for Melody Maker and providing artwork for groups such as The Clash (whom she once managed) and The Police. Coon's punk photographs are widely celebrated, having been used in a range of media, from the artwork for punk records to their inclusion in Jon Savage's remarkable study of punk, England's Dreaming. Some of Coon's photographs are held in the National Portrait Gallery collection.

By the time Coon left art school in 1968, figurative painting was deemed 'dead', but she avoided fashion and 'cool' and continued to work figuratively in oils on canvas with a brush. She was not interested in painting in new ways or working with 'new' materials but seeing and interpreting the world anew. Her painting is hot, usually structured around narrative and imprinted by pop art, feminist art and the politics of sexual liberation. Her hermaphroditic she/he human or queer figures confront and destabilise patriarchal, binary sexual stereotypes. In contrast to society's acceptance of the female nude, Coon's honest depiction of the male nude has been considered shocking - in 1995 the Tate Gallery banned her Mr Olympia painting because it showed an erect penis. Her work has since been exhibited in both group and solo shows and Tate Modern has acquired two of her recent paintings for its collection.

Coon continues to campaign for international justice and human rights, especially for women. She continues to campaign to end the prohibition of illegal drugs, including cannabis - bringing all illegal drugs within the law, licensed and controlled, like alcohol, nicotine and gambling. For more info, visit: [carolinecoon.com](http://carolinecoon.com)



Gardens Love © Caroline Coon

## Describe your work in 10 words?

Conversational moments of contemplation or crisis, detailed, feminist, sexual, fluid.

## How did you discover your own style, did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

Because I always wanted to make narrative, figurative paintings which talked back to historic images in order to change our future, I needed life drawing. Drawing is my religion. So, my style and my desire for my paintings to endure through time, timelessly, developed out of this traditional, some might say old-fashioned, way of seeing and working.







**Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?**

As a child, I was surrounded by the eclectic original art owned by my parents, from work by my great uncle FM Bennett to drawings by John Skeaping. At school, there were stage designs by Natalia Goncharova and Léon Bakst... I was trained early to be an artist!

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

The most difficult but exciting challenge was and always is: How to make my hand deliver on to canvas the images I see in my brain. I was thinking the other day – on my 76th birthday, in fact – how lucky I am that my old hands are still steady. I love work crafted stroke by stroke by human hands.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

After these months of asocial lockdown, it will be refreshing to join with many people looking together at real paintings in galleries. My spirits will be lifted, too, by seeing my work in group shows at Gallery 46, Carl Freedman Gallery and the Hayward Gallery.



Found Dead © Caroline Coon



Sheltering © Caroline Coon



# Ania Hobson

Ania Hobson is well known for her signature aesthetic and architectural portrait style. Inspired by painters such as Alice Neel and Kerry James Marshall, the artist uses both traditional and contemporary elements of portraiture to make the pieces uniquely her own. Hobson sketches her subjects directly on to canvas using pencil and charcoal. Working swiftly can often create a more natural and fluid look. Hobson also maintains this fast-paced work style by pre-mixing colours and skin tones in her own tubes and layering paint to create an impasto style of work.

BP Portrait Prize Winner 2018. Ania's work is in private collections in the US, UK and Europe. For more info, visit: [aniahobson.com](http://aniahobson.com)



My Blue, Paying Me an Unexpected Visit © Ania Hobson

## Describe your work in 10 words?

People reading, emotions, vital, mark-making, composing, psychology, tonal, situations, unforgiving, experiences.

## How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

My style changes over time; it changes with my own experiences just as we grow as people, we live and learn, and I feel this plays a big part in my painting, it's evolving all the while and will continue to do so. My painting is just a timeline of me and experiences that are just married into my work.







And Just Like That, She Was Gone © Ania Hobson

Two Moods © Ania Hobson



**Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?**

There wasn't a specific painting but more of a first show joint with my older brother Thom Hobson who is also an artist. We had such a positive reaction from that exhibition which gave me the confidence to take this further and make it into a career.

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

Dealing with painting and juggling with self-care too. Being a painter, we work with our emotions and use that to inspire us to paint. Sometimes it can become exhausting, so it's knowing when to take a break between the two. It can at times become a little overwhelming.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22?**

Solo show London 21 June Gillian Jason Gallery  
Group Show Andrea Festa Fine Art  
All Female group exhibition, September, Hong Kong  
Mother and Child Group Show, San Francisco  
Solo Show, September, SETAREH Gallery Düsseldorf





# Gill Button

Gill Button is an artist and illustrator based in London. Her confident, aqueous oil and ink paintings have been published in many leading publications, used for brand campaigns, and exhibited in numerous prominent galleries. Button studied at Maidstone College of Art, then later completed a Bachelor of Arts in Illustration at Kingston University, London. Graduating in 1995, Button has gone on to work for some of today's leading companies and some of our most influential publications, including the BBC, Wolf Ollins, Vanity Fair, Tatler, The Times, Gallimard and Gucci. Her work has been exhibited in the Fashion Illustration Gallery, Less is More Projects, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and Coningsby Gallery. For more info, visit: [buttonfruit.com](http://buttonfruit.com)



Willow © Gill Button



Stillness © Gill Button

## Describe your work in 10 words?

A fluid, visceral exploration of our emotional complexities, strengths, vulnerabilities.

## How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

It still occasionally surprises me when people recognise my work because, to me, it's just how I naturally paint. However, I do believe that the unique cocktail of elements that genuinely excite an artist inevitably come together organically to make an artist's work recognisable as their own. Self-identifying with a particular style I find a little tricky, and the word has a permanence about it which I feel uncomfortable with; I think it's important to move forward, unhindered by the fear of breaking from an established aesthetic. But development happens naturally and often slowly; even something seemingly minor such as mixing a different oil to solvent ratio can seem like an exciting shift in the studio to me... but to the observer, perhaps unnoticeable.

## Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?

Not a singular piece. But what stands out as the first pivotal exhibition I saw was the Hockney retrospective on a school trip to the Tate when I was 15. I loved his early works, such as Two Boys Together Clinging and Flight into Italy – Swiss Landscape, but I was particularly touched by the portraits of his mother.





**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

Dialogue with other artists is so important, and at times has been less easy to come by. When I first graduated, several of us rented a studio space together, which was great, and almost an extension of the art college experience; we maintained this for a few years, and it was amazing while it lasted. Good studio space is hard to come by in London, so I'm grateful for my space and the solitude it allows me, but at times I have really missed the regular art dialogue. With the rise of social media, things have been so much richer in terms of reconnecting with artist friends and making new ones to talk shop with, which has been incredible.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

An artist residency and exhibition at Han Feng Art Space in New York, which will be a nice echo to my residency and show in their Shanghai Space in 2019. We had originally planned it for autumn 2020, but it will happen as soon as it becomes viable and will be worth waiting for to include the residency part of the experience. I have an online presentation of new paintings with Unit London. I'm working with a publisher on a book that is pencilled to launch in autumn 21... And there are a couple of other things which I need to keep quiet about for now. But, at the moment, what I'm most looking forward to is a little inspirational getaway; returning from a trip always makes me more productive and vibrant in the studio.



Deserves a Quiet Night © Gill Button





# Sara Berman

After obtaining her BA in Fashion at Central Saint Martins in 1999, Sara Berman founded and ran her eponymous fashion brand for 15 years. This involvement with clothing and the body led to a visual arts practice which combines painting and textile works. Berman's work deals with the spaces we occupy. Corporeal, haptic, cerebral, societal. Space as an extension of self. Clothing, textiles, the domestic interior and the female body provide the platform for an exploration of materiality through painting, weaving, assemblage, collage and drawing.

Berman has had solo shows in London, Hong Kong, LA and New York, as well as being included in multiple group shows both in the UK and abroad. Her work is held in a number of private collections and institutions. For more info, visit: [sarahbermanartist.com](http://sarahbermanartist.com)



Twister © Sara Berman

## Describe your work in 10 words?

Figurative, abstract, material, mathematical, structured, intuitive, searching, meditative, colourist, female.

## How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?

My style is constantly evolving. I feel it is a little like concentric circles – earlier, I was more obviously experimental, and as my practice has developed, I have become tighter and tighter in terms of decision-making. These ever more precise decisions – which I feel gives my work its particular style – have come about through trying to understand what it is I am searching for within painting and having the confidence to allow the work to lead me. There is a fine line between pushing for it and searching for it.







Freefall © Sara Berman

Ooof © Sara Berman



**Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?**

I remember it so clearly. It was a work by Beverly Semmes called Kimberly at the Camden Arts Centre. It was the mid-90's, and I was about 18 or 19. The work was a giant orange and pink dress, which hung on the far wall and spilt pink tulle all over the floor of the gallery space. There were orange velvet cushions scattered all over the tulle on the floor. The light was pouring in, and the whole room was bathed in a pink glow, and it blew my mind.

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

Being a mother and an artist is complicated for me. I am always feeling guilty as my drive to work is constant, and equally, I want to be available for my children in whatever ways they need. It is hard to reconcile my desire to paint as and when I want with the needs of my kids, who need me to be physically and emotionally present for them within the framework of their daily lives. That said – I wouldn't change a thing, and I am sure the struggle feeds my work.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

I have a solo show with Kristin Hjellegjerde in her London Bridge space this coming summer and another solo in her Wandsworth space in 2022. I will be participating in various fairs and there are some fun publications in the works... We will see. I think we have all learned not to make too many plans!



# Sikelela Owen

Sikelela Owen paints what is closest to her: family, friends and relationships. The images she works with have endured as memories, to the extent that they are more than just a depiction of a moment in time. They represent an emotional echo given visual form. This sense of the intangible past is carried through in the way Owen paints. Her brushwork, on the one hand, expressive and gestural, is also laid down in light glazes as if layering one haze of memory over another. Detail is only what is strictly necessary: everything superfluous is omitted or lost. What results are paintings which tap into the loss of a precious moment and the sense of meaning that such ephemeral things can engender within us?

Owen studied painting at Chelsea College and then Fine Art at the Royal Academy Schools. Recent solo exhibitions include *Together* at James Freeman Gallery, London; *Supper, Sleep and Sorrow* at LDM Gallery, Florence; and *Love, Eat, Sleep, Repeat* at HSBC Canada Place in London. Her work was included in *100 Painters of Tomorrow* at Beers Gallery and in the *Thames and Hudson* publication. Owen was awarded a Fellow's Residency at the British School in Rome, and in 2020 her work was shortlisted for the John Moores Painting Prize. For more info, visit: [sikelelaowen.com](http://sikelelaowen.com).



David (as Olympia) @ Sikelela Owen

**Describe your work in 10 words?**

Loose figurative paintings which capture ephemeral memories and moments. .





**How did you discover your own style? Did it present itself innately or was it something you had to push hard to find, at the same time understanding that it couldn't be forced?**

The style which characterises the work has evolved intuitively as I have matured and learned to trust my own instincts. I've embraced the sensibilities that come through the painting process. I've also dedicated a lot of time to contemplating paintings which interest and excite me as a viewer, from Velázquez's Portrait of Sebastian de Morra to Mamma Andersson's About a Girl. These paintings have taught me what I like and helped shape what I want to create.

**Can you remember a first visual or artwork that may have provoked a desire to be an artist? What was it, and when did that happen?**

Yes. During my foundation, I remember the very first contemporary painting I fell in love with – Chris Ofili's No Woman, No Cry! It was beautiful, yet it felt like grief, and it had this intense physicality, which at the time I associated with the history paintings that I loved. It lured me in, and it made me think maybe I could make a painting with all the qualities, emotion and depth that it inspired in me.



On The Green @ Sikelela Owen



Knitting © Sikelela Owen

**What is or has been the most difficult challenge of being an artist for you?**

On a practical note, time. I have a six-month-old which means the practicalities of painting have really changed for me. I've become particularly fond of painting in the early hour of the morning accompanied by music. I make decisions that I might not otherwise make, and they are almost always good ones. Yet, I think the business of being an artist is an ongoing challenge. Like lots of artists, I think best in paint, so it's difficult being as eloquent in other forms. But it's a necessary consideration to be grappled with, much like composition.

**List of upcoming events to look forward to in 2021/22.**

- Spaces Artist Studio Award 2021-2022
- Limited Edition Print with Hospital Rooms 2021
- John Moores Painting Prize 2021
- Alessandro Albanese two person show with Sola Olulode 2021
- James Freeman (Solo Shows) September 2021
- Taymour Projects (Solo Shows) November 2021

