

Issy Wood's painting at Carlos/Ishikawa, Frieze London 2026. Photo: Linda Nylind. Courtesy of Frieze.

Art Criticism

The ‘Cinematic Crop’: How Issy Wood Inspired a New Painting Style

The British art star has been endlessly imitated.



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European News Editor

When the **National Portrait Gallery** in London chose **Issy Wood** to launch its new contemporary program, it couldn’t have been more on the money. The British art star’s outsize influence can be seen everywhere in painting today—a style I’m calling the “cinematic crop.”

The 12 self-portraits included in the mini-exhibition all make use of Wood's trademarks: surprising frames, soft focus, and visually seductive textural effects. One of the larger canvases puts the viewer uncomfortably close to the artist's face as she sips a Diet Coke in a glistening Korean skincare mask. In Wood's many still lifes, everyday items have a hyperreal, film-like glow, turning cutesy-kitsch porcelain ware, shiny puffer jackets, and smooth leather carseats into fetishistic fixations. By dispensing with context, the crop lends ambiguity to the otherwise mundane.

The distinctive style made Wood, 33, an international art-world star and a market sensation. She famously turned down an offer to join **Gagosian** in 2020, while still in her mid-20s. She made her auction debut the following year. Not coincidentally, the look has also spawned endless imitations. These works employ the same unconventional, intimate framing and sensual surfaces, but to what end? If Wood's paintings offer a wry, sometimes diaristic take on modern life, the same devices in other hands can result in work that feels a touch too removed from reality and devoid of her humor or psychological charge.



Issy Wood, *Whiplash / car interior* (2018). Photo: © Issy Wood 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and VeneKlasen, New York and London.



L: Issy Wood, *Self portrait 22* (2022). Photo: Eva Herzog, © Issy Wood 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and VeneKlasen, New York and London. C: Jesse Zuo, *Mildly infuriating* (2024). R: Julia Maiuri, *Night Stand* (2022).

Wood herself recently told the *Telegraph* that she is frequently sent "images of younger painters who are ripping me off." Walk into any art fair and you will see countless artworks that appear to bear her influence, whether intentionally or by osmosis—**Rachel Sharpe**, **Tomas Harker**, **Jesse Zuo**, and **Julia Maiuri,** to name just a few.

Some of the most commercially successful examples have created their own twist on the formula. London-based American painter **Joseph Yaeger** experienced a surge in popularity last year, appearing at the top of Artnet's "Zero to Hero" leaderboard, which measures a sudden spike in searches for an artist in the **Artnet Price Database**. The previous year, he joined **Modern Art** in London and **Gladstone Gallery** in New York.



Joseph Yaeger's *Silent Treatment* (2023), on display during a photo call for highlights from Sotheby's modern and contemporary art sales, February 26, 2025. Photo: Yui Mok/PA Images via Getty Images.

Many of his works zoom in on faces, whether partially concealed by a hand, fixed with a blandly shocked expression, or with lips inexplicably parted around a ping-pong ball. It is no surprise to learn that much of his source material comes from vintage films. Decontextualized in this way, the stills retain a vaguely ominous feel but tend to resist interpretation. Stylistically, there are hints of **Michaël Borremans** and **Luc Tuymans**, or even **Gerhard Richter**, but without any of the associations that refer back to real people, historical events, or themes of 20th-century existential angst.

A growing number of contemporary artists are reproducing enigmatic or plainly unnerving imagery without any obvious subtext, save for perhaps reflecting an increasingly dissociated response to a troubled world. Names that come to mind include **Valdrin Thaqi**, **Shannon Cartier Lucy**, and **Mia Middleton**, and in some cases the similarities are startling.

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Another artist who adopted the crop and triumphed is Manchester painter **Louise Giovanelli**, who was tapped by **White Cube** in 2022, just short of her 30th birthday. She has a new show opening at the London mega-gallery on November 20. Like Yaeger, Giovanelli uses a technique that enhances the luminosity of her paintings, and she also quotes images from old films that are often sexually suggestive or in some way allude to her Catholic upbringing. She is probably best known, however, for sumptuous swathes of fabric, in particular her hanging show curtains, which ask us to sit with dazzling surface effects but never pull back to reveal something more.



Louise Giovanelli, *Ad Astra* (2026). Photo: Theo Christelis, © White Cube, © DACS 2026.

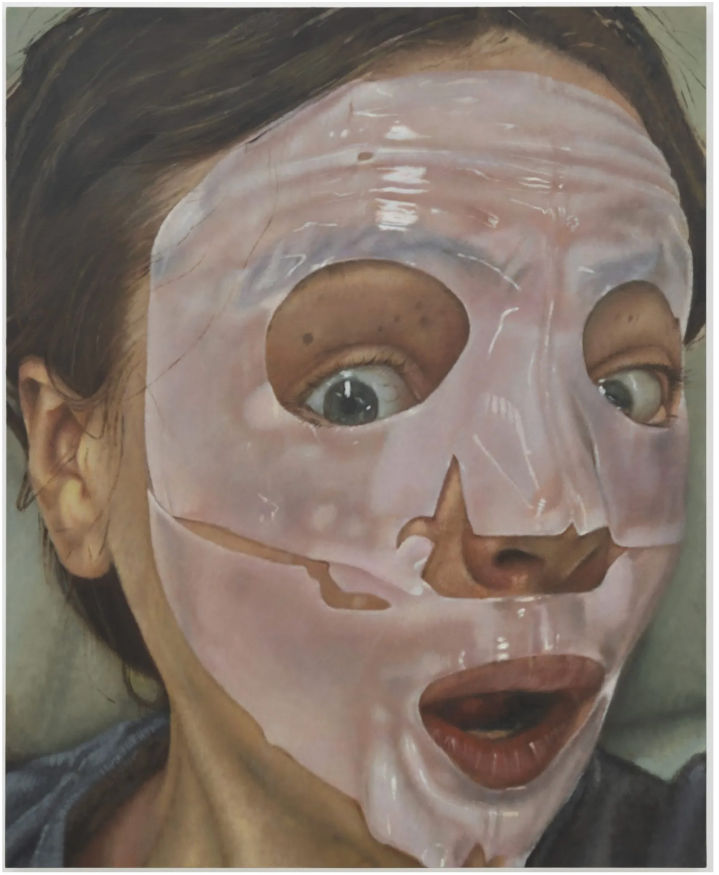


From left to right: Poppy Jones, *Leather Jacket* (2025). Photo: Jackson White, courtesy of the artist and Herald St. Issy Wood, *Untitled (How now)* (2023). Photo: Damian Griffiths, © Issy Wood 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and VeneKlasen, New York and London.

The acidic, grainy colors that make synthetic cloths gleam in Giovanelli's paintings also infuse **Jordan Sears**'s, and similarly glassy-eyed women throw their heads back, with expressions that could read as troubled or ecstatic. It is a debt that Sears herself has acknowledged. A shimmering curtain also makes a repeat appearance in the paintings of **Maude Corriveau**, while **Poppy Jones** focuses on just the zipper or snap buttons of a jacket, painted onto suede, in a manner that recalls Wood's many coat crops on velvet. The approach also won Jones a spot on Artnet's "Zero to Hero" list.

"Issy Wood: Self-Portraits" is on view through February 28, 2027 at the National Portrait Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London.

Wood's style continues to dominate the commercial landscape. Her *Self Portrait 91* (2026), in which the face-masked artist raises her eyebrows in a coquettish pout, featured prominently at last month's **Frieze London**, at the booth of her gallery **Carlos/Ishikawa**. Some attendees bemoaned the fair's lack of art engaging seriously with the countless social and political issues of our age. Whether or not painting should or could, in the era of Wood's cinematic crop, it simply won't.



Issy Wood, *Self Portrait 91* (2026). Photo: Damian Griffiths, © Issy Wood 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and VeneKlasen, New York and London.