

GILLIAN JASON GALLERY

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART BY WOMEN

Olivia Valentine: The Pink Cloud

7th - 30th July 2023



The Ballerina (2023), by Olivia Valentine

OVB
2023

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The term 'Pink Cloud' refers to a stage of early recovery from addiction that involves feelings of euphoria. Throughout her personal journey, Valentine came to understand that, for her, the remedy for addiction is 'connection.' Through this series of portraits, Valentine shares with the viewer her support network, exploring different ways of expressing emotional intimacy through her subjects. Grateful for all the interpersonal relationships she has had in her life, Valentine carefully constructs every painting to tell a story about the sitter.

“All these characters I've depicted in my paintings have had an important role in my life, whether that was a fleeting friend, a best friend or an ex lover. They all play a significant part in my life and have helped shape the very fabric of my being, coming and going at exactly the right time.” (Olivia Valentine)

Fascinated by the way in which we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to the world around us, Valentine investigates the dynamic between the past and the present and people's individual stories and narratives, in the firm belief that connection and resilience are the most powerful qualities for overcoming adversity. “All the world is a stage” says Valentine while breaking down her visual exploration of these individual characters she has interacted with at some point in her life; “these interactions are worth immortalising, life's too short to hold back from connecting with people and talking to them about your passions and purpose or even something insignificant and mundane.”

The undertone of Valentine's work is a serious one, for she wishes to raise awareness on the importance of mental health, removing the stigma behind it, particularly in relation to the disease of addiction. Yet, such an exploration is imbued with cheerful nuance: the artist focuses on the joys of recovery, and the new ways of living that it has gifted her and many others, investigating and capturing the feelings of hope, serenity

About Olivia Valentine

UK based, figurative artist Olivia Valentine studied traditional portraiture in Florence at Charles Cecil Studios. There, she learnt the old masters' technique called the 'sight-size', method rooted in the practice of Van Dyke, Velasquez and Titian, and based upon observing the model from a distance and to the scale of life whilst painting under natural light.

Since leaving Florence, Valentine has embarked on her own creative journey of self-expression. Valentine makes use of flattened perspectives and undulating planes to create an altered perception of depth. Paired with the vivid chromatic palette of her backgrounds, this method leads to a unique juxtaposition that confers a playful aesthetic to the traditionally portrayed figures.

The artist paints her sitters from life, focusing on capturing the fluidity and character of her subjects. Exploring the value of friendship, through her works Valentine narrates a story of support, encouragement and comfort.

At the Party, 2023
oil on jute
200 x 120 cm

£ 8,250



At the Party

Valentine believes that fashion is an intrinsic part of one's identity, which represents the way in which we want to present ourselves to the world. Preparing for a social occasion, such as a party, often involves reflecting on fashion choices and picking out an outfit that somehow represents us. 'At the Party' portrays two women, styled in flamboyant dresses reflecting their gregarious and free spirited nature.

"It's important for me to capture the very essence of my sitters, so I usually paint them in the clothes they feel most comfortable in, or most like themselves in. By doing so, I wish to divorce any sense of patriarchy and misogyny in my paintings, breaking conformities, in order to reclaim body autonomy. Fashion is often perceived as gendered and, historically, it has been used as a way to somehow control or oppress women; in my works I hope to shatter this sexist and archaic societal construct." (Olivia Valentine)

The Triangle of Sadness, 2023
oil on canvas
120 x 90 cm

£ 5,250



The Triangle of Sadness

‘The Triangle of Sadness’ reflects a past connection. It explores the character of someone that Valentine was deeply fond of and who had a tenacious hold over her. The sitter and the artist, in their personal relationship, gravitated towards one another due to their shared need of finding a sense of belonging. “It is only human to want to feel this way. Most people who suffer from addiction or mental health disorders can relate to the disease of the hole in the soul. We are constantly trying to fill that void with quick, unsustainable and self-destructive solutions.” (Olivia Valentine)

In the face of adversity, Valentine found comfort in surrounding herself with people who could relate to her struggle, allowing her to be vulnerable while providing a sense of safety and security. Though the connection between the two was characterised by toxic patterns and ‘triangles of sadness’, once that door of connection closed, many others opened, and opportunities for growth came along. To Valentine, this portrait represents a way of expressing forgiveness, compassion, hope and peace.

Actor in the Studio, 2023
oil on canvas
95 x 65 cm

£ 4,250



Actor in the Studio

As suggested by the title, 'Actor in Studio' portrays a friend of the artist, a theatre actor, posing with Valentine's brushes in the studio.

Valentine investigates the similarities between posing for a portrait from life and the art of performing on stage. Using a central focus on connection, the artist reflects how, at times, we can all be considered actors, contemplating the way in which we go about our daily lives, interacting with one another and the world at large. Relevant to this concept, is one of Valentine's favourite quotes, an extract from Shakespeare's 'As you Like It': "all the worlds a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

Valentine is always looking to bring different aspects of creativity into her studio, exchanging ideas and support with other participants of the creative industry.

At the Tailors, 2023
oil on jute
200 x 130 cm

£ 8,500



At the Tailors

'At The Tailors' depicts a mundane scene of two close friends trying on suits at the tailors. The figure on the right is slightly reluctant to be present, almost as if he were participating simply to support his friend, standing proudly on the left. For Valentine, this portrait is an ironic reflection of the very concept of perfection; something that we can never achieve, although we can strive for constant progress in our daily life. Yet, what fascinates the artist about the tailors, is the idea that you can alter your clothes to fit you perfectly, getting closer to the unattainable sublime.

Through this work Valentine also wanted to capture the importance of male friendship and masculine energy. The artist investigates how the patriarchy not only impacts women, but also has profound effects on men. Valentine focuses on the pressure there is on men to conform to societal expectations and prove their 'manhood' by exuding 'strength', often achieved by suppressing their feelings, commonly seen as a weakness. Invariably, says Valentine, this process disconnects men from their emotions, making it difficult to form true friendships.

In 'At the Tailors' Valentine wants to capture what she perceives as the true strength in masculine energy: the display of vulnerability, honesty and that kind of friendship which originates from a strong connection on an emotional level.

Poppy, 2023
oil jute
110 x 90 cm

£ 5,000



Poppy

The sitter of this portrait bears the name of the flower she is holding between her hands. Valentine was mesmerised by the contrast between Poppy's porcelain skin and the dark colour of her hair, reminiscent of John Singer Sargent's painting, 'Madame X.' Complexion is fundamental to Valentine as an artist, and she is drawn to specific features and colours, such as luminous skin and Roman-shaped noses.

This portrait is rendered with a subtle impressionist technique, which confers a sense of softness and movement to the subject - achievable only by painting from life, using natural sunlight. Valentine's production is influenced by a number of impressionist painters, such as Gwen John, Walter Sickert, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Vanessa Bell.

The poppy flower is emblematic of the subject's resilience and peace; she has a slightly earnest expression, although the portrait as a whole remains light and joyful, cultivating a sense of harmony. To Valentine "connection is the antidote to loneliness and isolation, even if that connection is with a flower. We are one with the universe, woven into this beautiful tapestry of life and we never have to feel alone." (Olivia Valentine)

The Ballerina, 2023
oil on canvas
70 x 55 cm

£ 3,750

The Ballerina



Since her childhood, Valentine has always had an ample admiration for ballerinas, which is reflected in her artistic taste: her favourite paintings are in fact Edgar Degas's *Ballerinas*, whom he painted from life. Valentine is profoundly drawn to the movement and light that characterise these impressionist masterpieces, which Valentine describes as 'time capsules' due to the ability of the artwork to involve the viewer in the scene, and thereby immersing them in the painting.

To Valentine, ballerinas also represent a perfection and through this portrait the artist wanted to capture the immaculate aesthetic of her sitter, a professional ballerina too. "Her luminous skin exudes a harmonious sense of light, especially against her dark hair. This is a timeless portrait much like Degas's work, resonating glamour and youthful innocence." (Olivia Valentine)

Self Portrait with Nino, 2023
oil on jute
200 x 130 cm

£ 8,500



Self Portrait with Nino

'Self Portrait with Nino', Valentine's dog, captures the powerful connection between two species that are completely different and also have an unconditional love for each other.

Valentine believes that love and affection show no limits and hold no boundaries, feelings so powerful that at times become ineffable. As a visual diarist who finds solace in exploring connection and intimacy, it is of paramount importance to Valentine to translate these emotions and relations onto the canvas as a cathartic and meditative release.

"The bond between myself and Nino is undeniably strong and worth capturing. It is Nino that has helped carry me through challenging times, giving me hope and boundless encouragement to pick myself up whenever I have fallen. Caring for another being, forces you to get out of 'self.'" (Olivia Valentine)

The Bride, 2023
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm

£ 3,500



The Bride

'The Bride' reflects on the societal pressure, particularly as a woman, to get married and settle down by a certain age. Valentine aims at breaking the idea of these traditions by normalising the beauty of solitude and approaching marriage as something that can exist in friendships and family, as well as romantically.

The sitter wears a bridal dress, adorned with a delicate, gold necklace, symbolising a marriage with herself. The colour of the contemporary background, gold, has historically been associated with abundance and accomplishment, qualities that for Valentine we can find in the relationship with ourselves.

The red moon, featured in many of Valentine's canvases, is representative of the divine feminine and symbolises hope and prosperity.

You Do You, 2023
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm

£ 3,500



You Do You

Following on from 'The Bride', 'You Do You' captures Valentine's ideal of the modern woman, free of, and independent from specific societal expectations. Captivated by the sitter's beauty, Valentine sought to immortalise her expression, conveying a sense of provocation and allure.

"A woman's worth should not be reliant upon the love of someone else. This portrait is a testament to singleness no longer being sneered at. There is something beautiful about her expression and knowing that it's ok to be single, it's ok to do you. It's more than ok, it's empowering and we should reclaim our history and stop being defined or criticised by others." (Olivia Valentine)

In line with Valentine's use of fashion as a means to subvert standardised bias of women's presentation, the sitter wears a tight, fitted top, accentuating her figure and highlighting the beauty of it.

The Twins, 2023
oil on jute
120 x 95 cm

£ 5,250



The Twins

Valentine is fascinated by the connection between twins and the exploration of nature and nurture as the years go by. The subject of this portrait are Valentine's twin sisters, who share an indelible and deep psychic bond which is difficult to understand for people who do not have this same profound emotional and genetic relationship emanating from the womb.

Valentine reflects on how a lot of twins embrace their similarities, whilst in this case, they strive for individuality, essentially different in both countenance and in spirit. In 'The Twins' Valentine aims at capturing the gentleness and softness of her subjects' expression, exploring the sense of nostalgia that can be found in the simple act of picking fruit. For the artist, picking fruit is a primal pleasure, which reminds her of her childhood days and connects her deeply to her family.

A Fleeting Friend, 2023
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm

£ 3,500



A Fleeting Friend

‘A Fleeting Friend’ is a portrait of a young woman who crossed paths with Valentine during her stay in Italy. At the time this portrait was painted, the sitter was experiencing a great deal of adversity. While her story is not Valentine’s to tell, the artist is interested in the connection between herself and her subject. Valentine was fascinated by the delicate beauty of her sitter’s imperfections, the complexity of her life and the remarkable individuality and uniqueness that characterised her.

Like the rest of the subjects in ‘The Pink Cloud’ series, the ‘Fleeting Friend’ also played a pivotal role in shaping Valentine’s life and person: “her palpable energy was contagious. There is something magical about connecting with people on a brief but often intense level. I am grateful for the fleeting friendships I have made with her and, although we live worlds apart, perhaps one day our paths will cross again.” (Olivia Valentine)

Self Portrait in Corset
oil on jute
100 x 70 cm

£ 4,500



Self Portrait in Corset

'Self Portrait in Corset' narrates a story of heartbreak as well as resilience. The work was in fact painted during a period of emotional turmoil for Valentine. The artist often paints self-portraits when experiencing a difficult time, with the aim of looking back at these paintings in the future, recognising her strength in overcoming various hurdles. In this work, Valentine is pursuing the emotional despair of heartbreak, grieving over a connection with someone, whether a best friend or a lover.

Valentine portrays herself in her most vulnerable and true state, finding comfort in a cup of tea and in her favourite clothing. The corset is symbolic of women's independence through and within fashion, having undergone a rather interesting and specific evolution throughout history: "The corset itself has taken on new roles in contemporary society and reappeared in couture lines during the past decade. Popular culture icons have transformed the corset from a symbol of female oppression to a symbol of female sexual empowerment." (Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History*)

Ireland Wisdom, 2023
oil on jute
120 x 95 cm

£ 5,250



Ireland Wisdom

Artists painting artists

From Gauguin's portrait of Van Gogh to Warhol's polaroids of Basquiat, it has often been a tradition for artists to capture fellow artists. Olivia Valentine also follows this art historical custom, allowing the viewer to access a personal dialogue between artists. 'The Pink Cloud' features portraits of three contemporary painters who form part of Valentine's support network: Ireland Wisdom, Deborah Segun and Max Anish.

Valentine met Ireland Wisdom in Florence (Italy), where they both trained classically. Wisdom uses the rigorous sight-size technique in her work. Valentine describes Wisdom as a gracious and effervescent being, whose classical style of painting contrasts delicately with her contemporary aesthetic and progressive outlook on life. Here, Valentine portrays Wisdom holding a vibrant palette, which encapsulates a metaphorical meaning, coming to represent a reflection of the artist's character.

Deborah Segun, 2023
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm

£ 3,500



Deborah Segun

Artists painting artists

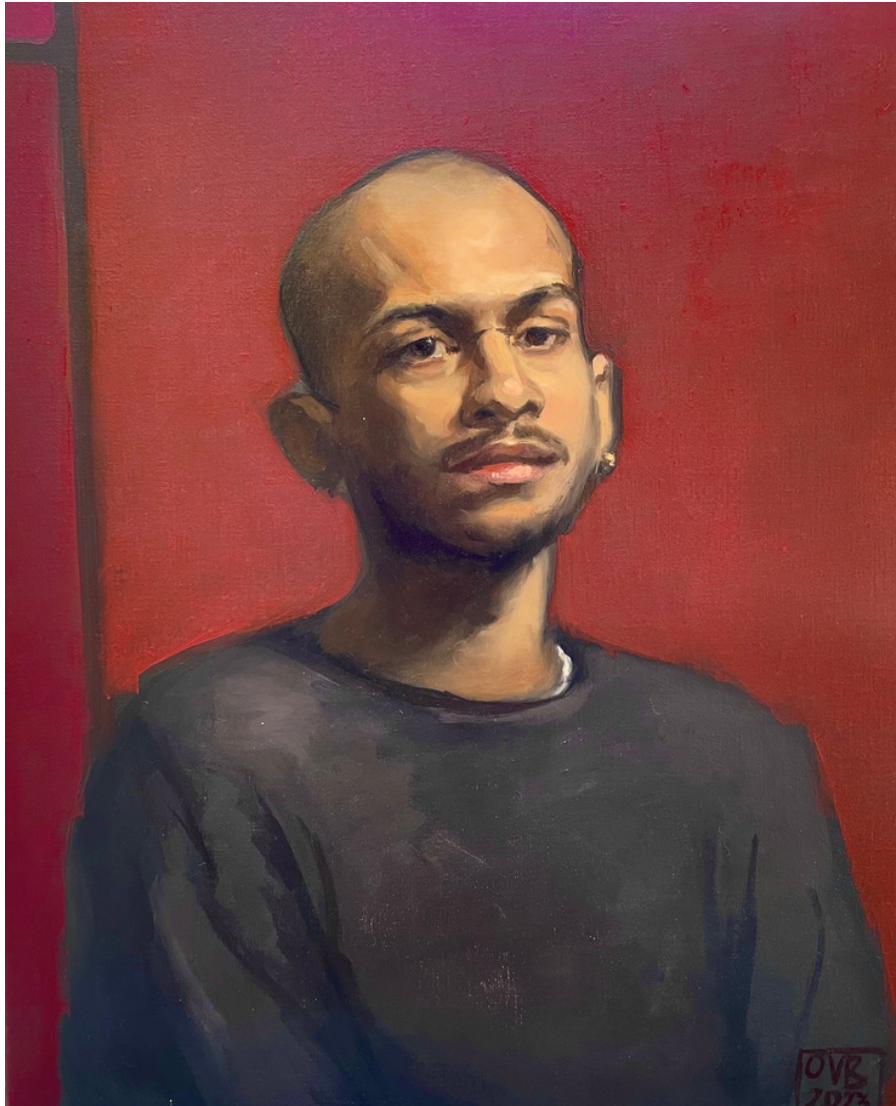
By choosing to portray both Ireland Wisdom and Deborah Segun, Valentine comments on the importance of female friendship within our competitive contemporary society:

“There is something so special about two female artists coming together and seeing each other as opportunities for progress and inspiration rather than tearing each other down because of the fear that there’s not enough room for everyone to succeed, which is the fear our society indoctrinates us with.” (Olivia Valentine)

Valentine also met Segun during her stay in Florence. While posing for the artist, Segun would burst into laughter and then slip straight back into her serious and pensive expression, which Valentine likes to describe as the ‘peg the patriarchy’ look. Valentine wanted to capture exactly that nuance, the imperious and fierce gaze and the bold attitude that characterise Segun. This aim was achieved by bringing the corners of the mouth up slightly and arching the sitter’s eyebrows in order to emphasise such an expression.

Max Anish, 2023
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm

£ 3,500



Max Anish

Artists painting artists

Max Anish is an expressionist artist from Mauritius whom Valentine also met in Florence, building a profound personal and professional friendship that stands til this day. Although the sitter's expression remains earnest and somewhat profound, through his portrait Valentine wanted to convey the joy, admiration and gratitude she feels towards Anish. In describing the fellow artist Valentine states:

“Max is what we call an intuitive visionary with an extraordinary set of skills and the ability to capture the little moments; he lives presently and doesn't take any moment for granted. Max has a unique sense of serenity which is infectious and his aura is inspiring and always protective.”

In line with Valentine's distinctive style, the sitter is portrayed with a traditional brushstroke which is contrasted with the contemporary fashion of Anish's jumper.

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