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Artsy

'The Artsy Vanguard 2021: Louise Giovanelli'

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The Artsy Vanguard 2021: Louise Giovanelli



In preparation for her recent exhibition “*Auto-da-fé*,” at GRIMM’s Tribeca gallery, Louise Giovanelli searched for a final reference to top off her paintings’ theatricality and allure. She landed on the classic 1976 thriller *Carrie*. What better fit than the distorted tale of a prom queen gone wrong?

“I rewatched *Carrie* paced down to grab that emotional shift from joy to devastation,” Giovanelli said. Aside from Sissy Spacek’s iconic performance, the Manchester-based painter was fascinated by the era’s grainy filter—a haziness she amped up and channeled into her paintings. For the exhibition’s two titular works, Giovanelli projected the film’s epochal crowning scene onto a freshly painted white surface. “I am not interested in the human form, per se, but rather the color meeting the light that meets the texture,” she said. “And sometimes they happen to contain figures.”

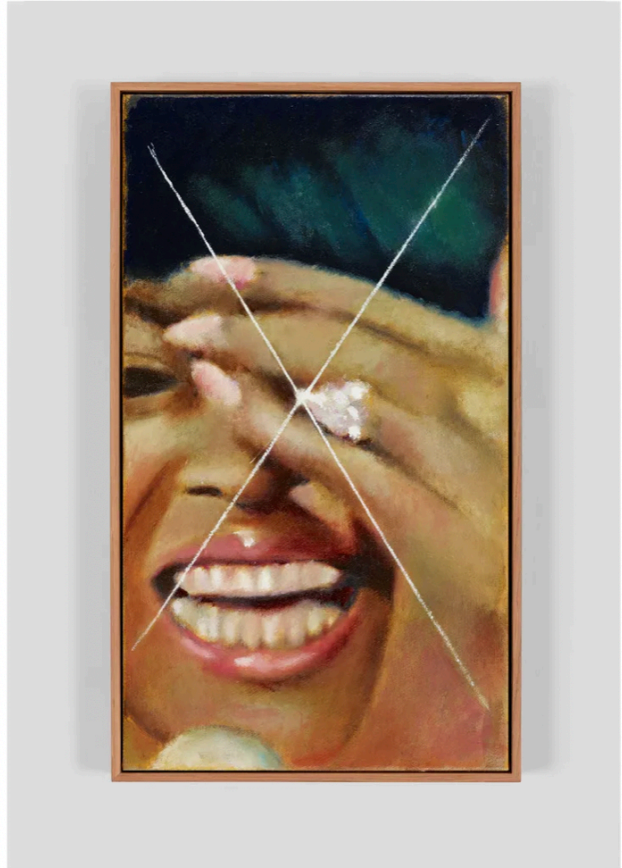


Louise Giovanelli

Plexus, 2021

GRIMM

Sold



Louise Giovanelli

Caryatid, 2021

GRIMM

Sold

Giovanelli's eerily glamorous and contemplative visions of fleeting moments owe their intrigue to the artist's deft, layered technique, which baffles even the most trained eye. Absorbingly mysterious and lushly tactile, her paintings have cemented a place for the 28-year-old among a wave of contemporary artists creating figurative work responding to the cacophony of digital imagery. In the past two years, Giovanelli has presented four solo shows, with GRIMM and Workplace, London; she was awarded the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation grant; and presented her work in group shows in Amsterdam, New York, and London, including the survey of contemporary painting "Mixing It Up: Painting Today," at the Hayward Gallery, London.

Giovanelli's signature trait is a glittered, almost trompe l'oeil effect that she casts over the canvas. "My process is quite similar to that of the Old Masters, with a thin glaze of underpainting which, when left untouched, lets light reflect through the white gesso," she said. Each piece requires five or six layers.

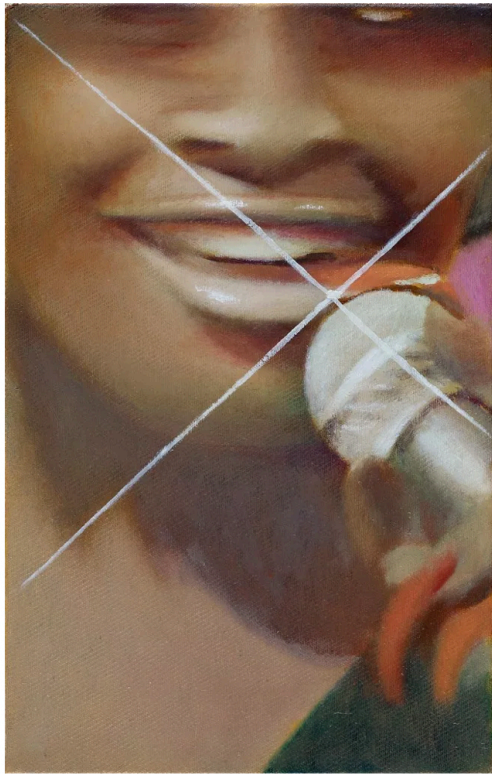


Louise Giovanelli, installation view of “Auto-da-fé” at GRIMM, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM.

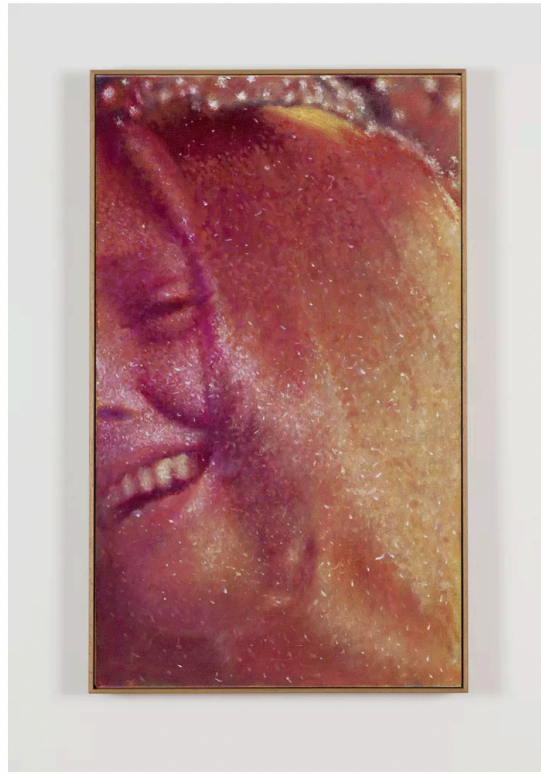
Glitz is often at the heart of the imagery Giovanelli selects for each of her shows. She pulls from her own digital archive of over 1,000 images—a bottomless pool of references. “They mostly find me,” she said of the constant additions to her ever-growing repository. She often encounters new content through Instagram. Conscious of the image whirlwind surrounding her, Giovanelli snaps her smartphone whenever the opportunity rises. “I am glad to be in this age of image proliferation,” she said. And while she may or may not utilize every photograph she gathers, sometimes one image will appear in numerous paintings.

Giovanelli’s studio is a former cotton mill located amid Manchester’s industrial red brick façades. She arrives early in the morning along with workers from nearby warehouses and clocks out around 5 p.m. Approaching her studio practice like a full-time job helps her stay focused and disciplined. While working, she puts on a playlist of songs with placid rhythms and minimal lyrics, typically bands like Cocteau Twins. “If I hear what they’re saying, I am out of the vibe,” she said. “I prefer the voice becoming an instrument rather than a statement.” She initiates a few paintings at once

while others are left to dry for a week or two; some paintings are made up of five or six layers. Between wide shoulder gestures and timid wrist movements, the artist slowly determines each work's prevailing sentiment.



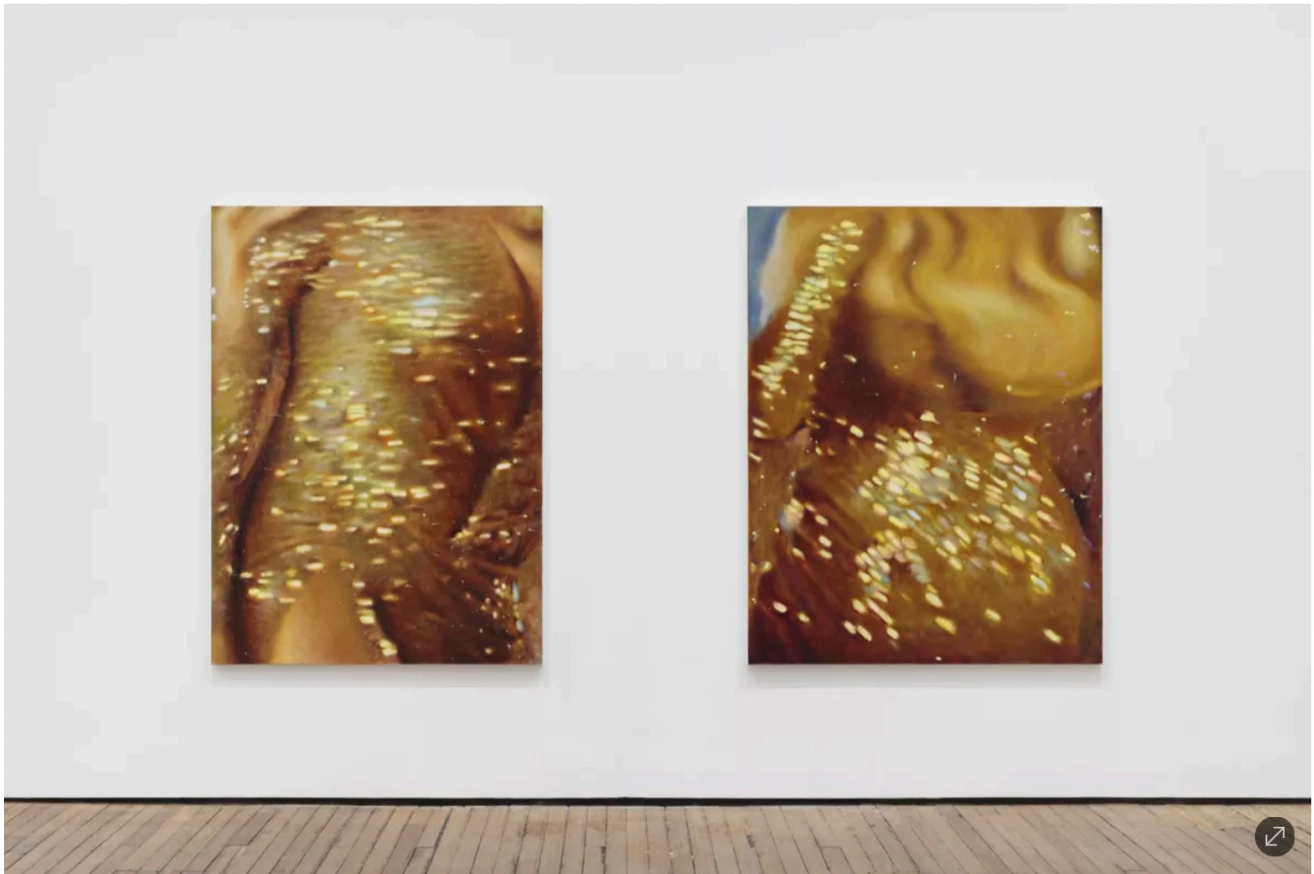
Louise Giovanelli
Caryatid, 2021
GRIMM
Sold



Louise Giovanelli
Auto-da-fé, 2021
GRIMM
Sold

Her latest exhibition at the Dutch gallery's New York outpost contained a variety of ongoing mini series, focused on objects like stage curtains, wigs, and leading ladies. The paintings, ranging widely in size, occupied the gallery's record shop-turned-white cube interior like scenes from an enigmatic play.

Two curtain paintings, which are hung separately, bookend the show, potentially unveiling or shrouding a suite of narrative possibilities. Hefty and layered, the curtains embody the persistent ambiguity that runs throughout Giovanelli's work. "Are we standing behind or before the stage—if there is even one?" she asked. From a technical lens, the drapes offer her opportunities to experiment with their various folds and gradients of color. She had used a gray color palette for her initial take on the subject a few years ago; those curtains had a closed-off relationship with their surroundings. "Whereas these are radiating outwards," she said of the new works, with their vibrant lime green hues.



Louise Giovanelli, installation view of “Auto-da-fé” at GRIMM, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM.

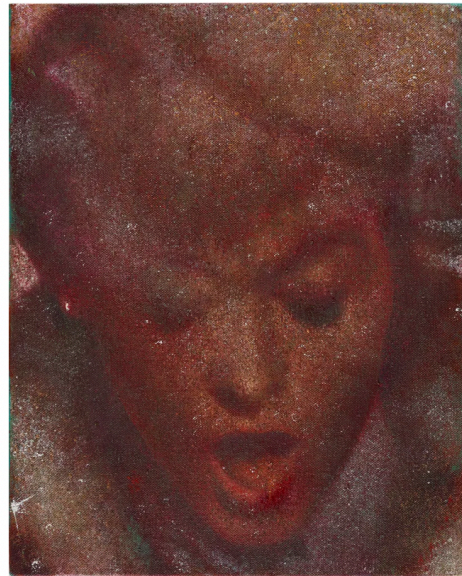
The London-born artist’s interest in performance and panache date back to observations of Byzantine art and the interiors of Catholic churches. Giovanelli sees little difference between the ornate gold shrines or set-like altars and a stage, where glamour is utilized to convey divinity and grandiosity. “We go to both settings to have our breaths taken by the ravishment,” she said. In her work, she searches for “faint glimmers of human presence.” And as a viewer, it’s clear that through her painterly process and eye for detail, she finds them.

A trio of paintings, each titled *Orbiter* (2021), replicate blown-up details from Mariah Carey’s sequin dress in her televised Christmas special last year. The canvases—with hints of décolletage and wisps of blonde hair—are awash in sheen, swirled up to an engrossing effect, both hazy and crisp. Giovanelli does not own a TV, but she signed up for a streaming service to screen the show upon realizing the footage’s potential. “When I slowed down the video, the dress became a spinning wind of glitter—I had to translate that into painting,” she said. The artist is not quite interested in her subject’s public persona, but rather the visual promise and exuberance

that Carey represents.



Louise Giovanelli
Peeping Tom, 2020
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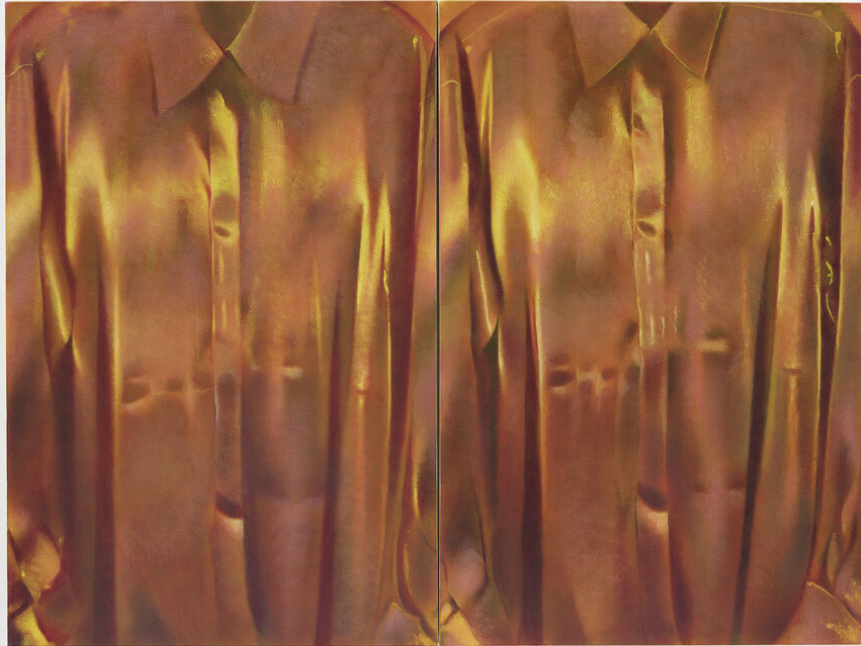
Louise Giovanelli
Cameo, 2020
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With each new show, Giovanelli seeks to set “a compelling mood for contemplation.” She knows that the viewers’ relationship with the paintings is beyond her control and thrives on that dynamic. “The work should take them to a new mindset, and if that is not the same place I imagine in my head, that’s okay,” she said. The open-ended nature of her work is entirely intentional; she avoids being too illustrative, which could “leave nowhere for the viewers to go.”

Unsurprisingly, Giovanelli is a cinephile and approaches her work with cinematic effects in mind, from the content of her paintings to the final impact. She’s previously made paintings of Tippi Hedren’s terrified expression in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 thriller *The Birds* and the victim in the 1960 British cult horror *Peeping Tom*. In both cases, she was interested in the flicker of emotional transition on the subject’s face.

“After a good film, you feel changed, but you cannot put your finger on why,” Giovanelli said. She builds her own narratives with her favorite

directors in mind—“those who use the screen to make slowly moving paintings,” she described, offering Andrei Tarkovsky as an example. She’s interested in the durational and psychological differences between looking at a painting and watching a film.



Louise Giovanelli
Wager, 2021
GRIMM
Sold

While it might be tempting to consider Giovanelli a figurative painter, she doesn’t identify as such. “Painting a sitter, for example, would never cross my mind,” she said. In our landscape of Instagram filters, face-editing apps, and Photoshop, the artist decodes the potential of painting, all while harnessing its relationship to photography and film. Stillness or motion, digital or real, and seen or remembered, her ambiguous sparkles of moments can simultaneously connect us to the glare of a screen and the glint of daylight.

Similar to the curtain paintings, a duo of shiny dress shirts are the subject of *Wager* (2021). They seem suspended in air, devoid of a wearer or a trace of being worn. That sense of absence excites Giovanelli: “They’re thresholds of places where things are about to happen,” she said.

The Artsy Vanguard is our annual feature recognizing the most promising artists working today. This fourth edition of The Artsy Vanguard is a triumphant new chapter, as we present an in-person exhibition in Miami featuring the 20 artists' works, including many available to collect on Artsy. Curated by Erin Jenoa Gilbert, sponsored by MNTN, and generously supported by Mana Public Arts, the show is located at 555 NW 24th Street, Miami, and is open to the public from December 2nd through 5th, 12–6 p.m.

[Explore more of The Artsy Vanguard 2021](#) and [collect works by the artists](#).



Osman Can Yerebakan

Header and thumbnail image: Portrait of Louise Giovanelli. Courtesy of Louise Giovanelli.