

Jo Chate Janet Sainsbury

New Paintings

12 June — 1 August 2026

New Art Projects is delighted to present a two-person exhibition of new works by **Jo Chate** and **Janet Sainsbury**, bringing together two distinct approaches to portraiture that reframe how female identity is constructed and reimagined through painting.

Jo Chate (b. Essex, UK) lives and works in London and is a graduate of UCL, Kingston University and the Royal College of Art, London, receiving an MA in Painting. Her work examines how women are represented in art and makes reference to historic painting, music and current events, which become combined in her canvases. She often uses a mannequin as a stand-in for the female body and uses it to explore how the female figure is placed and represented. She first saw the mannequin in a pharmacy window in central London, dressed in medical underwear, flanked by skeletons, and it has become a recurring motif in her work, first as 'Warrior' then later as 'Idol'.

Chate considers how female power is expressed. Images of the divine female are explored and questioned, and her paintings pick apart recognisable images of the female deity historically constructed by men. In *The G Code = The Goddess Code*, Chate looks at the elevated composition of the Madonna della Misericordia by Piero della Francesca, where the viewer looks up at an elevated woman and her pose shows her power. In Chate's mind, female deities are connected and she associates Hindu deities whose arms are symbolic extensions of a divine being's powers.

The consideration of the divine feminine continues in *Half Woman Half Universe*, *High Priestess Hot*, a title that comes from a song by Ashley Sienna, and continues with her exploration of the composition of Leonardo's *The Lady with an Ermine* (c. 1489–1490) in two works: *No Ermine* and *Lock In*. In these works, Chate examines the representations and signifiers included by Leonardo in his depiction of Cecilia Gallerani. Leonardo wanted to depict Cecilia as an individual of intellect without the usual markers of marriage or family crests. It is subsequent art historians who have interpreted the symbolism of the ermine in conflicting ways. Chate removes and alters these elements to underline Cecilia as an independent intellectual force. Rather than presenting her as either pregnant or subservient through marriage, Chate seeks to represent her for a modern age.

Janet Sainsbury (b. Worthing, UK) graduated from Brighton Art School in 1991 and Turps in 2019. Her work consists of painted portraits of artists and writers predominantly from the last century, and her practice is driven by curiosity about the lives of others. Through research, she is excited to uncover fascinating links and connections between her subjects, which feature an eclectic cast of characters drawn from art history, literature and popular culture. They are selected because Sainsbury admires their work, is intrigued by their personal stories, or likes their “look” and finds them beautiful, and sometimes because she feels their importance has been undervalued.

She is an avid reader of artists' and writers' biographies, ranging from Katherine Mansfield to Amedeo Modigliani, Jean Rhys to Edvard Munch, and Chaim Soutine to Hannah Höch. She observes that “there has to be something that snags my attention in order to make me want to paint them.” She explores how artists from the past continue to exert influence over contemporary understanding and consciousness through their historical mythologising or contemporary reappraisals. By painting them, Sainsbury gains a stronger sense of connection and believes in them as real, flesh-and-blood characters.

She begins by working from black-and-white photographs found online or in books; she adds her own colour and uses oil paint, inks and watercolours, sometimes painting onto found materials such as postcards and other ephemera. She repeatedly repaints her subjects; in this way she begins to learn their faces, alongside their stories, and to form a relationship with them.

For this exhibition, Sainsbury has completed a new series about the writer Jean Rhys. She has long been a fan, but her interest has been renewed by a recent re-reading of her novels and short stories, and by reading several biographies. Alongside this, she has visited Cheriton Fitzpaine, Devon, where Rhys lived and wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys was mistrusted by her neighbours and hated village life; her dreams of her childhood in Dominica remained vivid. This sense of being haunted by ghosts, of not belonging, and of a double life has fed into Sainsbury's portrayals of her.

The exhibition will be open from **12 June to 1 August**.

Open Thursday to Saturday, 11am-6pm, and by appointment.

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