

VILLA STUCK

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Louise Giovanelli

A Song of Ascents

October 18, 2025 to March 15, 2026

Curators: Marie-Charlotte Carrier and Dr. Helena Pereña

An exhibition of the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery in collaboration with the HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark, and the Museum VILLA STUCK, Munich

What lies behind the curtain? Before a performance begins, all attention is drawn to the still-curtained stage. As the tension mounts, everything takes place first in the audience's imagination—expectations and possibilities are limitless. British painter Louise Giovanelli captures the magic of this fleeting moment in her often large-scale oil paintings. While the motif is transient in nature, the richly detailed fabrics exude a permanent quality. In collaboration with the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery and HALLE FÜR KUNST, Steiermark, the Museum VILLA STUCK presents the artist's first major solo exhibition in Germany. On view are ten new works alongside a representative selection of work from recent years.

The play of concealment heightens curiosity. Giovanelli invites her audience to consider perception, knowledge, and the very mechanisms of representation in art. The frame, or stage itself, emerges as the true subject, a space where she explores the full drama of color, light, and texture. Her draped fabrics, created through countless translucent layers of color, are reminiscent of Renaissance paintings. Yet the material seems to dissolve theatrically in glittering highlights. Giovanelli applies this same technique to other subjects such as dresses and wigs, which appear at once meticulously rendered and highly artificial. In this way, her painting reflects on the artifice of art itself.

At the heart of Giovanelli's seemingly glamorous spectacles lies her fascination with rituals that pave the way to altered states of mind and being. Some of the artist's depictions of stages are based on so-called Working Men's Clubs. These associations for the working class arose in nineteenth-century Britain as a counterpart to the elite gentlemen's clubs. For Giovanelli, these spaces embody both escape and the promise of possibility. Religious references also permeate her work, such as the inquisitorial auto-da-fé. This was the public ceremony to announce the verdict of the Spanish or Portuguese Inquisition, often followed by the execution of the sentence by the secular authorities. Similarly, the exhibition's title, *A Song of Ascents*, borrows from the psalms sung by pilgrims on their way to holy places. Giovanelli is interested in the convergence of these realms, where such rituals give way to transcendence.

Religion meets the equally ritualized ecstasy of nightlife. Drawn from the visual language of 1970s–90s pop culture, Giovanelli's paintings fuse sacred ceremony with the hedonism of the club scene. This tension plays out vividly in her smaller portraits: blurred, fragmented faces caught in expressions of agitation or rapture, mouths open in gasps of intoxication, pleasure, or horror. Intoxication becomes a mind-expanding experience, blending drugs, sex, and enlightenment. Desire converges with horror and violence with increasing intensity. Individual traits fade into the background.

Giovanelli draws inspiration from diverse sources—photographs, film stills, iconic moments in European art history—but the glamour in her work rises above specific allusions as well as ethnic and social differences. Glitter obscures the true appearance, distracting even from worn curtains. In this radiance, there is no individual feeling of otherness, just collective ecstasy.

VILLA STVCK

Louise Giovanelli (b. 1993, London) is one of the most promising British artists of her generation. She lives and works in Manchester. In 2023, she co-founded the nonprofit Apollo Painting School with gallerist and curator Alice Amati and artist-scholar Ian Hartshorne, positioning herself as a key figure in Manchester's emerging art scene. After earning her BA from the Manchester School of Art in 2015, Giovanelli studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main with Amy Sillman from 2018 to 2020. She has had numerous solo exhibitions, including at the He Art Museum in Foshan, China (2024); Moon Grove, Manchester (2023); the Manchester Art Gallery (2019); Workplace Foundation, Gateshead (2019); Warrington Museum and Art Gallery (2018); and Grundy Gallery, Blackpool (2016). Her work has also featured in group exhibitions at the FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2023); the Hayward Gallery, London (2021); the AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam (2021); and The Art House, Worcester (2019).