

GLASS

“Giving overlooked objects a stage” – Florence Houston and her wonderful jelly paintings

👤 Rosie Lowit 🕒 May 20, 2025 📁 Art, Exhibitions, Feature, News

“I LIKE taking overlooked objects and giving them a stage”, painter [Florence Houston](#) tells me. I’m sitting in her West London studio a week prior to the opening of *Powder Puff*, her solo show at [Lyndsey Ingram](#). The exhibition comprises seventeen works, nine of them close-ups of wobbling jellies. The others include whipped cream towers, cakes and a cone of glacé cherries.

Having trained in portraiture for four years at the Italian atelier [Charles H. Cecil Studios](#), Florence’s large-scale desserts suggest, in a sense, a departure from the rigorous discipline she was taught. “There’s a lot of pomp around portrait painting, oil painting,” she explains, “There’s a huge weight and history behind the medium, so I quite like using oil to paint whatever I want: a light bulb, jelly or some strepsils. It’s refreshing.”



Whilst Florence's subject matter is certainly a conscious rejection of the training she received at art school, her works are imbued with the same notion of grandeur you might expect from a portrait. "When you light strepsils and put them on the right backdrop, there's a real beauty there. I wouldn't paint anything that doesn't have that aesthetic quality to it."

The exhibition is rooted in the aesthetic, with *Powder Puff* a nod to the cosmetic pink powder puffs that Florence's grandmother used to keep on her vanity table. The memory of them, so strong that the artist can still remember the smell, has informed her approach to painting. "I'm really interested in this pursuit of perfection", she tells me, "And that's how I tend to view the jellies. They're beautiful, but they're not appetising. It's not really about how they taste; for me, the point is the way they look."

All of Florence's paintings centre around a striking colour palette, which in turn offers each one a distinct mood. "When I came back from maternity leave in January, I started painting an orange jelly on a pink plate with a yellow background (*Tequila Sunrise*, 2025), which is a very in-your-face colour combination. I was listening to a certain type of music at the time and it gave the work a sort of aggressive feeling; I think it was a reflection of coming back into the world after giving birth."

In a similar vein, one of the show's central works, *Odette* (2025), is a jellied rendition of a pink pointed breast, the areola and nipple red and swollen. The painting of the piece also coincided with the birth of her second child, and thus her days were dictated by her pumping schedule. "When I posted the painting on Instagram, a lot of people were commenting underneath, saying 'oh my god, this reminds me of breastfeeding!'. Another commented, 'ugh, Mastitis.' I thought maybe my inspiration was ambiguous, but clearly not!"



These tones, bright reds, oranges and purples, recall a childhood spent at the artist's grandparents' house, which she tells me hadn't been changed since the 1960s. Her works are tinged with a sense of nostalgia for the lurid lime green party desserts she grew up with, but her influences aren't restricted to personal experiences.

For her impressive knowledge of the food, Florence credits the "online jelly community", several members of which have attended her exhibitions armed with facts to share. Victorian jellies, she tells me, would double as a status symbol: "The bigger the jelly, the more impressive your household kitchen staff were." Someone once came to her show and revealed that at the turn of the nineteenth century, being seen eating the dessert alone meant that you were available for sex. In a similar vein, the term 'jelly-house' was synonymous with a whore house.

It was at her solo exhibition *JUICY!*, at Notting Hill's [J/M Gallery](#) in November 2023, that attendees started to draw her attention to Caroline ([@adventuresinjelly](#)). "Her name was one that kept being raised, so we linked up over Instagram", Florence explains.

"Nowadays, she'll send me photos of all of her moulds, and I'll sketch out what I want. She actually has a job in the city, but cycles to my studio in the morning with a cool bag and we unmould the jellies together before she goes to work."

by Rosie Lowit

Powder Puff is on at Lyndsey Ingram until 8 June 2025.