ART AND CULTURE / EXHIBITIONS & SHOWS

London artist Dani Trew explores the female experience through contemporary and historical high fashion

Women are the enigmatic main players in an exhibition of new paintings by Dani Trew, on show at Lyndsey Ingram in Mayfair

By Anne Soward | Published 32 minutes ago In Features



Why should a dress be less profound than a painting? For a new solo exhibition, 'Silk on Stone on Lace on Flesh', currently on show at Mayfair gallery Lyndsey Ingram, South African-born, London-raised artist Dani Trew draws on the history, power and symbolism of femininity, exploring it through the medium of fashion. In her finely detailed paintings, women are portrayed less by their faces than by the cut of their dress, the contrast in footwear, a delicate fabric. For the artist, fashion textiles encapsulate 'history, sociology, ethnicity, class, power, production, identity'.

Trew's artistic output is informed both by her multicultural upbringing and a distinguished academic background. She studied English literature at the University of Oxford, and the history of design at the RCA, before undertaking doctoral research on fashion and politics in late-19th-century Britain and working as an assistant curator in the V&A's furniture, textiles and fashion department. Her first solo show, 'To Make Shirts from Anemones' – a comment on the silence of women throughout history and their longstanding connection with textile production – took place at Lyndsey Ingram in 2024; in this, her second, her paintings are a study in accumulation: of stories, invented and true; of textures and fabrics, spun, woven and manufactured; of costumes, clothing and cultures that reveal as much as they hide.

Clothes are not the only powerful signifiers here, though. Trew's work is replete with references to ancient friezes, Renaissance painting, ornamentation and architecture. She describes the world she conjures as 'psychic archaeology': a space where the self – and the present itself – emerge as provisional architectures, assembled from inherited fragments, material encounters and desires, their boundaries continually shifting between surface and interior, memory and matter, history and flesh.

Her largest work to date, *Far from the Shores of Silence*, depicts seven women, their heads out of frame, clothed in historic or contemporary high fashion: designers include Coperni, Conner Ives, Prada, Simone Rocha and Mimi Wade. Each figure has a bent right arm that nurses a plate, upon which rests an attribute of a female saint, some of which embody the subject's torture or death. They include a winter rose for Rita; a pair of breasts for Agatha; Lucy's eyes; Veronica holding a cloth imprinted with Christ's image; Catherine of Siena's white lily; Apollonia's tooth; and Agnes the lamb, represented as a small white bonnet with an animal's ears. The limpid, intricate beauty of the painting, in its palette of pale pink, deep lilac and soft blue tones, heightens the horror of the subject matter.



The inspiration behind the work was a visit to the Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy, famous for its sixth-century Byzantine mosaics, which depict 22 female martyrs, dressed in the high fashion of the time, in sumptuous garments, jewels and tiaras. By transposing them to the present day and portraying them holding the evidence of torture and murder, Trew makes clear both the passage of time – of which costume is a great signifier – and the importance of situating women within a history that has long attempted to silence or subdue their powers. But there is also a more personal aspect. 'As I was mapping out these women, it was as if I was releasing different versions of myself from different periods,' says Trew.

Each painting in this show is rich with intricate details and hidden motifs as Trew weaves together seemingly disparate visual references, allowing unexpected narratives to emerge. Threads are followed, re-spun, discarded, begun again. As ever, this is how new images come to life.

'Silk on Stone on Lace on Flesh' is on show until 23 December at Lyndsey Ingram, 20 Bourdon Street, London W1, lyndseyingram.com✱