

# Issy Wood

## Magic Bullet

11 Sep 2025 – 31 Jan 2026

### Issy Wood: A Throw of the Dice

Issy Wood's paintings croon in a vocal key tuned to a trickle-down image delirium: blurry images of internet detritus and auction lots on soft velvet in moody hues for the breakup ballad of a jaded lover. To live among the artist's images, resonant with the 19th-century Symbolist impulse to privilege emotion as reality, is to exist as projection, figment, and person at once—intimacy always shadowed by estrangement and choreographed authenticity. In trompe-l'oeil still lifes on tactile velvet and linen, clothing, furniture, and musical instruments, her painted objects of desire are both material and illusory. You might even say Wood, as an artist, cosplays as an avoidant ex: resisting full disclosure of her symbolic codes—sharp nails for strength, accessories for armor, heaps of ice cream tempting a purge—like a diary with a light padlock. This dynamic of give and take forces the viewer to question what's truly “real”—and to keep wanting more anyway.

Throughout Wood's work, visual surfaces and opulent accessories are not superficial but a material condition through which reality today is experienced. For nearly a decade, Wood has confronted sinister belief systems and their ghosts in Sad Boy tears, midlife crises cars, and idols of perverse femininity with taut skin like C-list celebrity Joan Rivers (a surrogate for her mother). Her idiom borrows from the tongue of antiquity—and with it, anachronistic hierarchies of value and self—but the sensibility is contemporary. Born under Saturn's dominion in 1993, Wood, a Capricorn, and her work battle with discipline and control—a worldview inherited from doctor parents who believed mind and body must be kept in check. But in *Magic Bullet*, any semblance of diagnostic logic gives way to a somber melody composed by an artist living her own double life as a self-described “failed musician.”

Throughout the show, viewers must negotiate partial truths and appearances, encountering paintings on sexy black guitars and speakers arranged like a Sotheby's auction for a washed-up rockstar's estate—the market clinging to the royalties of past fame. Maybe it's just as simple as this: if pop songs can talk about loneliness and love and contemporary malaise, failure, even life's sharp brevity, why can't paintings?

Rendered in centuries-old, illusory techniques of picturing reality—the chiaroscuro of Enlightenment rationalism, the blurred perception of Impressionism—Wood's contemporary references ask how we got ourselves here. In her hands, a driverless silver Mercedes becomes a portrait of collective autopilot. Do we even have free will? Does the House always win? Her current image bank includes Madonna and Child icons, engagement rings, numbered Powerballs, and Christian cross necklace charms. Functioning as wagers of truth and certainty, the stakes of her symbols are heightened by the harmful effects of literally, physically losing touch and time to bed-rot-scrolling doom—and, thus, faith in the reality as we thought we knew it.

The rolling dice of her recent work recalls the clocks of her earlier paintings. “I've been thinking a lot about time since turning thirty,” she confesses, describing it as “a cop or a private investigator following me around.” Wood is fascinated with standards of feminine beauty and nostalgic loss: all symptoms of bargaining with time's authority and the promise of a chance for an instant glow up. Painting becomes a merciful reminder of what cannot be reversed. “To be able to ctrl+Z a gesture is seductive,” she says, “but not so possible in painting.” Or in the aging process. “What is a woman and what makes her scary?” Is she childless? Emotionally detached? Can she be controlled?

Resisting moralization or straightforward critique, her work wryly satirizes the cultural values and tropes we've inherited in an age of collective absence and performativity. In the realm of screen-born disassociation that swallows our nervous systems and hearts whole, the artist's iconic deadpan melancholy has uncovered another psychological stratum. A deep emotional hunger that has morphed from valid need into a craving desire to get those needs met in a world that constantly fabricates more needs by withholding. It also gives form to the self-fulfilling anxieties and consumer dreams we cling to as attempts to fill the void. Nonetheless, Wood calls out that we are complicit, calculating how we can win the game of social currency and survival of the richest—and thinnest.

In this light, Wood's paintings record the quiet losses of living in a world of autotuning and catfishing, where even lying about your age becomes a ritual. “I lied a lot when I was younger,” she admits, “mostly to myself.” In her paintings, fragments of body parts suggest conditioned dysmorphia and envy that culminate in sardonic absurdity: compulsive adornments of innocent girishness in porcelain figurines and dinnerware or green ribbons. These motifs blur into vertiginous, depthless spaces like advertising's infinity backdrops or some kind of dreamspace that is insistently real and an illusion of our own making.

Rich with illusion, skeptical of absolutes (“Reality is very that couples therapy idea—what he says and what she says and the truth,” she quips), the exhibition’s central gambit is seemingly about this lack of trust and control. The numbered orbs suspended midair recall French Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira le Hasard* (A throw of the dice will never abolish chance), scattering meaning like a fallen house of cards. For both poet and painter, chance is the structure of modernity, one we try to win through “success.” Mallarmé’s refusal of guaranteed fate—in his rejection of linearity—mirrors Wood’s own rendering of the risks we take in self-presentation of looking good in order to feel good. Her misty images are not immaterial; they are the very conditions of order in which we live.

Ultimately, Wood’s paintings ask us to read between the lines of vulnerability and projected self-mythology. In doing so, they serve as cheeky astroforecast, eulogy, and vow to question the oaths society demands we make seemingly without choice—while acknowledging that we still subscribe to these beliefs as a way to counter the unknown. So maybe there is a magic bullet: an ego death that explodes the whole charade by taking the hand off the trigger and refusing to play—or beating the system at its own game. Wood’s practice insists that to live is to acknowledge that our world is one of constructed surfaces but, perhaps, we can cut through in observing, and wagering a pact, with the uncertain. She paints not to master uncertainty, but to make it visible — the only act of agency in a world of appearances.

Text: Margaret Kross

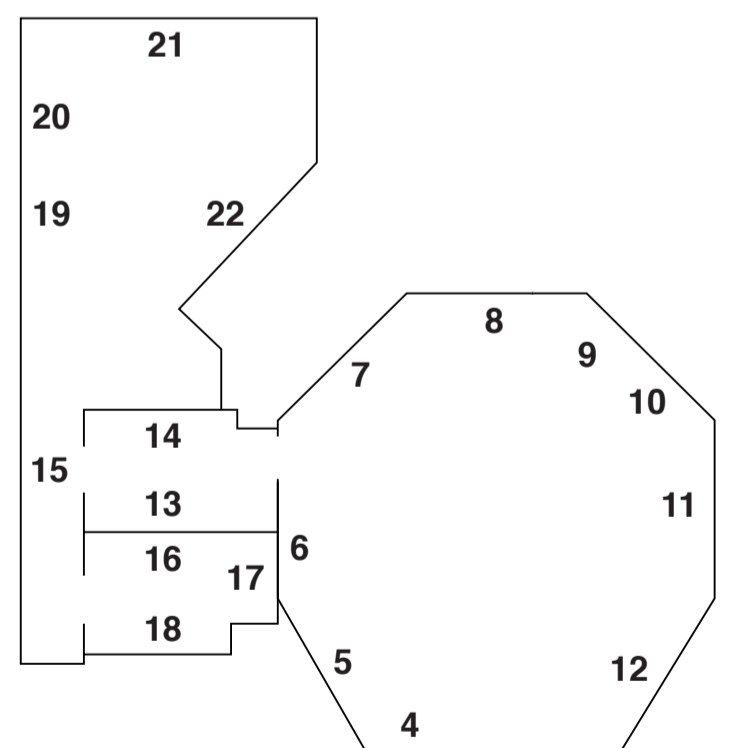
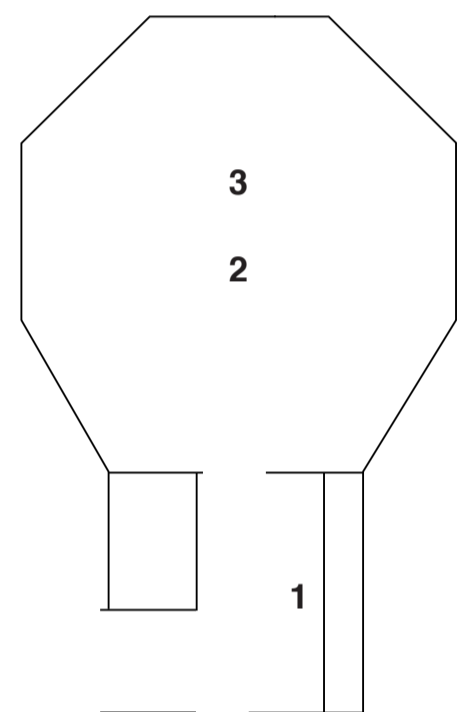
## Works

### Upstairs

- 1 - *Self portrait 64*, 2025, Oil on linen, 175 x 215 cm
- 2 - *MUSIC*, 2025, Oil on music instruments, Dimensionen variabel
- 3 - *SCHINKEL.WAV*, 2025, 17:08 Min.

### Downstairs

- 4 - *Soft serve / dice*, 2025, Oil on linen, 20 x 30 cm
- 5 - *Fucking joyride*, 2025, Oil on velvet, 140.5 x 240.5 cm
- 6 - *Lobotomy goals study*, 2025, Oil on linen, 92.5 x 92.5 cm
- 7 - *EU 42*, 2025, Oil on linen, 90 x 246.5 cm
- 8 - *Toast / blouse*, 2024, Oil on linen, 162 x 212 cm
- 9 - *Untitled (Dietetix)*, 2021, Oil on linen, 19.5 x 30 cm
- 10 - *Go, Daddy! (I saw you rolling)*, 2020, Oil on linen, 24 x 30 cm
- 11 - *Rough facetime study*, 2025, Oil on velvet, 140.5 x 240.5 cm
- 12 - *The (amazing) back*, 2025, Oil on linen, 120 x 255.5 cm
- 13 - *Ice cream (You speci ically)*, 2025, Oil on linen, 140 x 100 cm
- 14 - *Crisis Is*, 2020, Oil on linen, 30 x 24 cm
- 15 - *Tarsal tunnel ballroom dance study*, 2025, Oil on linen, 30 x 21 cm
- 16 - *My neck / my scapula*, 2025, Oil on velvet, 42 x 30.5 cm
- 17 - *Mbulimia moodboard*, 2025, Oil on linen, 30 x 40 cm
- 18 - *Love / is all that I can give / 2 U*, 2025, Oil on linen, 100 x 140.5 cm
- 19 - *Slouching towards the maxillofacial unit*, 2018, Oil on linen, 100 x 138 cm, Loan: Antonia Josten
- 20 - *Friendly Dalmatian study*, 2021, Oil on linen, 21 x 30 cm
- 21 - *DINNER 2*, 2025, Oil on linen, 167.5 x 232.5 cm
- 22 - *Stiff peaks study*, 2024, Oil on linen, 140 x 100 cm



Loans unless otherwise stated: courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Michael Werner Gallery



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