

Issy Wood

Magic Bullet

11 Sep 2025 – 31 Jan 2026

Issy Wood: A Throw of the Dice

The paintings of London-based artist and musician Issy Wood croon in a vocal key tuned to a trickle-down image delirium—reality as runaway where surface is treated not as “mere” superficial formalism but the main event. In luscious trompe-l’oeil still lifes on velvet and linen (and occasionally clothing, furniture, or music amps), Wood cosplays as an avoidant ex of the most skilled love-bombing variety. In turn, her work gives form to the self-fulfilling anxieties we hold onto in order to fill the void: obsessive cravings for scraps of certainty in heaping ice cream towers, a thin physique, heartfelt pop music, and opulent luxury. And so, unknowingly (or knowingly) we deploy control tactics to try and get our valid human needs met. Although conditioned by powers outside our control, Wood calls out that we are still complicit.

For almost a decade, Wood has confronted sinister belief systems and their ghosts of misogyny and class in the form of Sad Boy tears, midlife crises cars, and idols of perverse femininity with taut skin like C-list celebrity Joan Rivers as surrogate for her own mother. Resisting moralization or straightforward critique, culling imagery of empty heirloom dinnerware from auction catalogues, Wood’s work has been fascinated with the question: what have we inherited and how has it been passed down? In more recent years, the artist’s iconic deadpan melancholy has uncovered another psychological stratum: a recognition that forces of control now arise from a deeply internal emotional hunger in which collective absence swallows our nervous systems and hearts whole at warp speed.

Wood’s current image bank exists in the form of cropped Madonna and Child icons, wedding rings, numbered Powerballs, and Christian cross-bearing necklace charms, functioning as wagers of truth whose stakes are heightened by the harmful effects of literally, physically losing touch—and, thus, faith in the reality as we thought we knew it. To live among Wood’s images, resonant with the 19th-century Symbolist impulse to privilege emotion as reality rather than its afterimage, is to exist as projection, figment, and person at once—intimacy always shadowed by estrangement, and the “actual” self by an image we ceaselessly act to create but cannot contain.

Wood’s work notoriously speaks to anachronistic hierarchies of truth in the tongue of antiquity, but she was born in the US in January 1993. Her parents practiced a brand of medicine that framed body and mind as opposed. Wood is a Capricorn, ruled by Saturn, associated with discipline and control. “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.” The artist’s fixation with footwear, muscle pain, crash diets and bingeable food: all symptoms of bargaining with time’s authority and American capitalism’s promise of a chance for instant change if you’re worthy of survival. Painting, for Wood, in turn becomes a counter-time in her smudged and desaturated renderings of hallucinatory objects and patterned porcelain dinnerware. But *Magic Bullet* doesn’t promise a remedy, or an elixir, as any semblance of diagnostic logic gives way to a somber melody composed by an artist living a double life as a “failed musician” in her own self-deprecating musings.

Maybe it’s just as simple as this: if pop songs can talk about loneliness and loss, why can’t paintings?

Rendered in centuries-old techniques once associated with Enlightenment rationality’s hierarchies, Wood’s work indicts the collective autopilot that got us here. Do we even have free will? Does the House always win? A driverless silver Mercedes, unworn sharp kitten heels: who are these objects of fetish luxury even for? Importantly, Wood interrogates her own complicity in societal values and stereotypes: “What is a woman and what makes her scary?” she once asked rhetorically. Is she childless, or child-free? Is she old? Is she emotionally detached? Does she know the cosmos? Can she be controlled through nearly imperceptible gestures by telling us to look the other way?

If the clock in Wood’s earlier works insisted on the forward march of time, the dice of her recent work now stage the attempt to act without certainty of outcome. Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira le Hasard* staged this condition typographically, scattering words like falling dice—a recurring motif in Wood’s recent paintings. Mallarmé’s reminder—that there is no guaranteed fate—refuses the comfort of linearity or control that Wood’s work similarly edges. As the poet mused: “False memory / immediately / evaporated into mist / that will impose / a limit on the infinite.” For both poet and painter, chance does not exist in opposition to order; misty images are not immaterial but the very conditions of order in which we find ourselves.

Rich with illusion, skeptical of absolutes (“Reality is very that couples therapy idea—what he says and what she says and the truth,” Wood quips), the exhibition’s central gambit is a roll of the dice or numbered orbs suspended midair. Throughout her work, viewers must negotiate partial truths and performative gestures, encountering paintings on sexy black guitars and speakers arranged like the Sotheby’s auction display for a washed-up rockstar’s estate who continued to play for the pure love of the game. Maybe there is a “magic bullet” after all: an ego death of sorts, the kind that can explode the whole game by taking the hand off the trigger and refusing to play.

In this cultural framework, Wood’s images resonate as records of losses that come with inhabiting a world of autotuning, catfishing, lying about your age by one year your whole life (my grandmother did this). Afterall, you cannot game your relationships with

others or your own psyche. Or can you? “I lied a lot when I was younger,” Wood admits, “mostly to myself.” In her paintings, body parts suggest conditioned dysmorphia and envy that culminate not in spectacle but proliferate through sly absurdity: compulsive patterns like swirling twists of soft serve ice cream decorated with green ribbons (*Ice cream (You specifically)*, 2025). These motifs occupy vertiginous spaces, reminiscent of advertising’s infinity backdrop, music video dream sequences, and fleeting memory entered in a small diary “with a padlock.” In this way, her paintings ask us to read between the lines of vulnerable boundaries and wry self-mythologizing—a spectrum of earnest anxiety and acerbic sarcasm.

Wood’s practice is part cheeky astroforecast, part self-fulfilling prophecy, part eulogy, part vow to question the set of oaths contemporary society demands we make at no choice of our own. To paint is to commit anyway, and the work becomes, in her words, a “merciful” reminder of what cannot be reversed or, for that matter, “gamed.” To choose to embrace the unknown anyway is to trust the universe, to trust in one’s own integrity and our relationship. “Being able to ctrl+Z undo a gesture is so seductive,” she notes. “But not so possible in painting.” Or in a carefully composed text hoping it lands as intended. Wood’s practice insists that to live is to wager, to accept a pact with the uncertain. To look, to act, to paint, to love is to throw the dice that will never abolish chance.

Text: Margaret Kross

Works

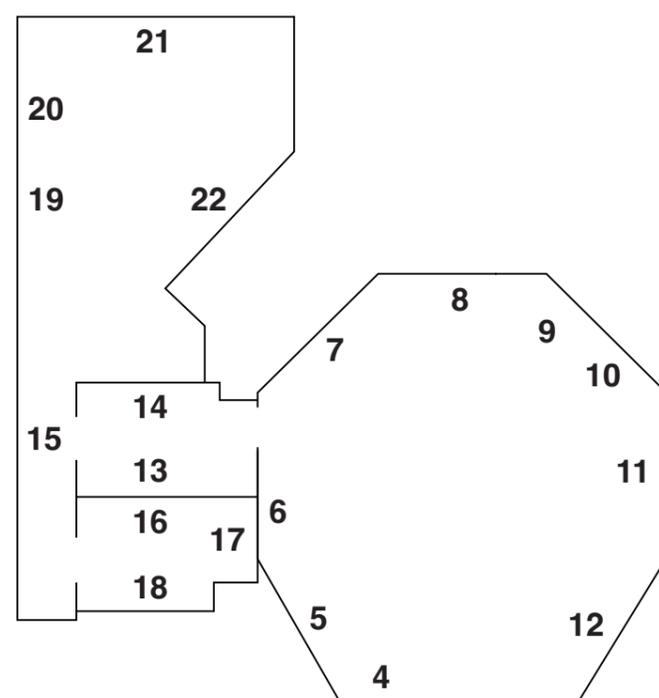
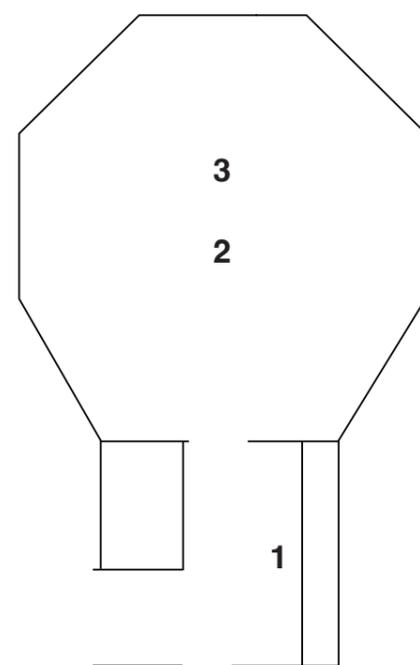
Loans unless otherwise stated: courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Michael Werner Gallery

Upstairs

- 1 - *Self portrait 64*, 2025, Oil on linen, 175 x 215 cm
- 2 - *MUSIC*, 2025, Oil on music instruments, dimensions variable
- 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 specifically)*, 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 - *Bulimia 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



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