This exhibition offers the opportunity to see new work by Jenny Saville inspired by the Ashmolean’s exhibition ‘Titian to Canaletto, Drawing in Venice’.

Muse, 2012-14
© Jenny Saville, courtesy Gagosian Gallery, Private Collection

The works exhibited here for the first time evoke Jenny Saville’s profound engagement with art history. The striking expressive and material qualities of drawings by Venetian artists such as Titian, Tintoretto and Palma Giovane have become catalysts for exploring the nature and power of drawing in thoughtful yet visceral new works on paper and canvas.
Jenny Saville Drawing

For British Artist Jenny Saville, the marks and traces of painting and drawing are interwoven. She depicts the relationship between the movement and musculature of the human body, and the movement of line and gesture through drawing. Narrow marks allude to the shape of forms, and broader marks to their internal surfaces. Linear drawing and painterly values are fused.

Discuss

> How does an artist like Jenny Saville decide when a drawing is finished? How do you decide when your work is finished? Discuss your ideas.
> Describe the types and range of marks Jenny Saville makes in her drawings? Write down all the words you can think of which describe the qualities of different types of marks.
> How does Jenny Saville show movement within her drawings? Discuss the types of marks used.
> How do the drawings of flesh and bodies differ in this exhibition? Consider the fine delicate mark making in some of the works in contrast to the heavily layered areas in others.
> Why does Jenny Saville sometimes introduce a single colour such as red into her drawings? How does the use of colour work to define or highlight areas of the drawings?
> Jenny Saville often uses layering in her drawing work. How does layering alter the depth of the picture space?
> Compare the mark making Jenny Saville uses with work by artists such as Titian, Tintoretto, Palma Giovane and Canaletto. Discuss the similarities and differences and consider their choice of subject matter.

Mother and Child (8) study, 2015
Graphite on watercolour paper
© Jenny Saville, courtesy Gagosian Gallery, Collection of the artist

‘Drawing has become an important way for me to study movement and therefore time—whether it’s a wrestling infant in a mother’s arms, couples embracing, a fight or children digging in the sand.

It’s this part of Titian and Tintoretto that I’ve particularly been looking at. These drawings may not have the astonishing anatomy and draughtsmanship of Michelangelo or Leonardo but they represent a moment in Venice when the materiality of drawing and expression come to the surface.’

Jenny Saville
Ideas for activities

> Sketch in the gallery using a pencil. Choose three of Jenny Saville’s drawings and sketch areas of them on top of each other. What effects does the layering create? Outside of the gallery try experimenting by layering pastels and chalk—experiment with the qualities of these materials.

> Using charcoal, create a large scale figurative sketch. Once finished, use your hand to ‘rub out’ your drawing then smudge it back into the paper. Repeat the process of drawing and rubbing out to create layers—experiment with holding the charcoal in different ways to create different marks to create complex visual layers.

> Cover a piece of paper in charcoal—use your fingers to smudge the charcoal in. Use an eraser to remove areas of the charcoal to create the highlights in your drawing. Once you have created the larger areas of light and shadow more details can be added with chalk and charcoal.

> Use a photocopy of an old master drawing. Draw on top of it using pencil, pen, charcoal or chalk. How does your mark-making alter it?

Further study

> Find out about Jenny’s Saville’s painting work outside this exhibition. Compare and contrast how faces, flesh and the human form are represented in her painting and drawing work.

> Compare working large scale on paper and working small scale in a sketchbook. How does this alter your drawing? How does it feel physically?

> Experiment with scale. Enlarge a drawing from your sketchbook or another small scale study you have made. How does scale alter the way you relate to a drawing?

> Try to create a drawing which contains movement. Ask someone to pose and move for you while you draw. How can you capture motion using mark making and tone?

> Try creating a self portrait with some very detailed areas and others with only a few subtle marks to suggest the form.