

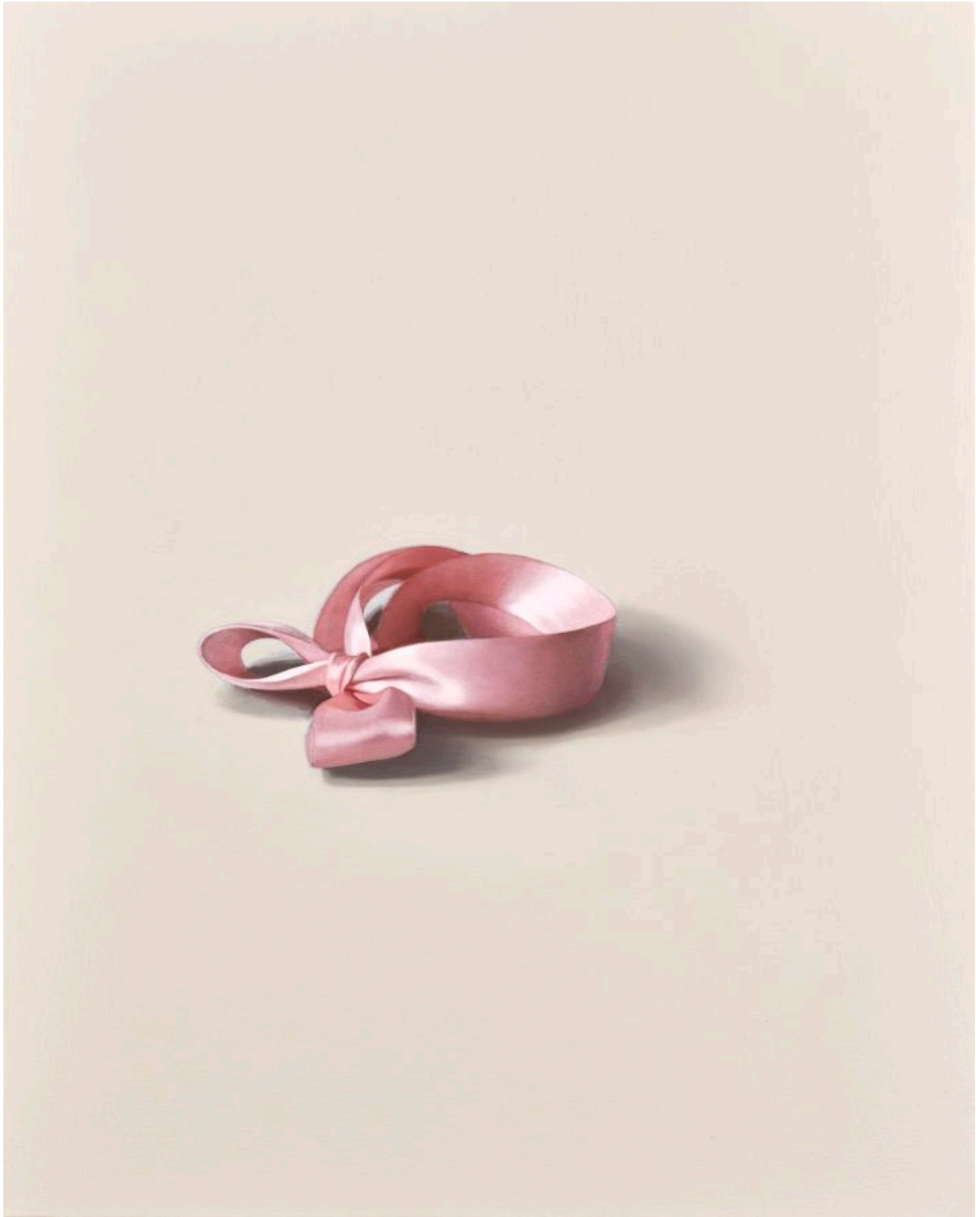
Alison Watt – A Portrait without Likeness

A significant new body of work by artist Alison Watt who is widely regarded as one of the leading painters working in the UK today, is to be exhibited for the first time, at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (SNPG) this July.

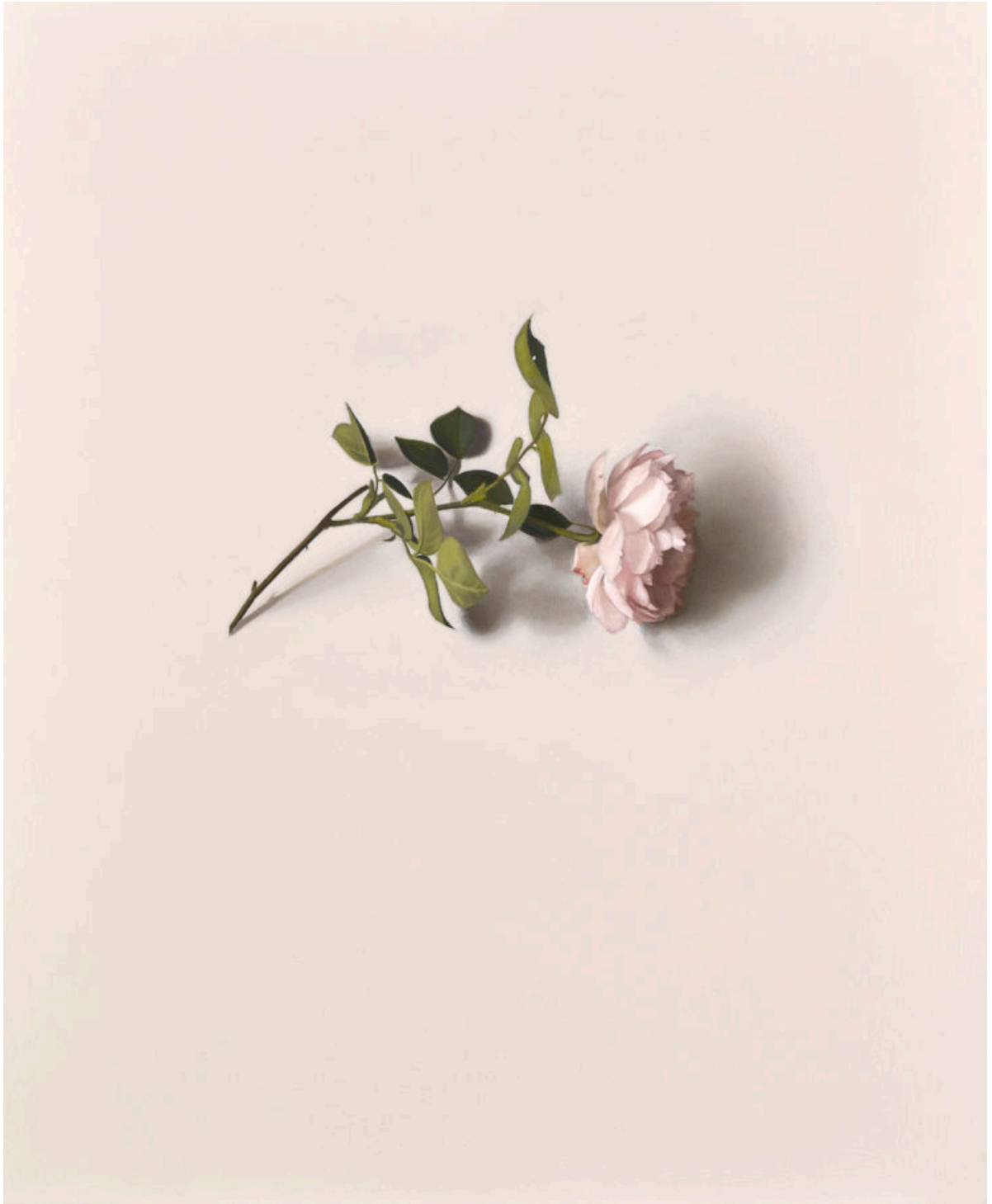
Watt, most known for her beautiful and intricate large-scale paintings of drapery and folds, will exhibit a series of new paintings made in response to the practice of the celebrated eighteenth-century portrait painter Allan Ramsay (1713-84) in *Alison Watt: A Portrait without Likeness*.

A Portrait without Likeness will explore Watt's continuing fascination with Ramsay's portraits, and is the fruit of a long period of study into paintings, in addition to drawings and sketchbooks from his extensive archive held by the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS).

Watt has long been an admirer of Ramsay's portraits of women, in particular the intensely personal images of his first and second wives, Anne Bayne (c. 1739) and Margaret Lindsay of Evelick (c. 1726-82). Both portraits reside in Scotland's national art collection and will be shown alongside Watt's new work.



■ *Anne*, 2019 by Alison Watt (b. 1965). Oil on canvas, 67 x 53.5cm. Collection of the Artist © Alison Watt.



■ *Centifolia*, 2019

Oil on canvas, 75.5cm x 62cm

Collection of the Artist

© Alison Watt



Margaret Lindsay of Evelick, Mrs Allan Ramsay, c 1726 – 1782, created 1758-60

Oil on canvas, 74.3x 61.9cm

Collection: National Galleries of Scotland, bequest of Lady Murray of Henderland 1861



Anne Bayne, Mrs Allan Ramsay, d.1743, Wife of the artist Allan Ramsay, c.1739 by Allan Ramsay (1713-1784). Oil on canvas, 68.3 x 54.7cm. Collection: National Galleries of Scotland, purchased 1983.

Watt said: "Looking into an artist's archive is to view the struggle that takes place to make a work of art. A painting is a visual record of the inside of the artist's mind. A painting

is something that takes place over time; it is not static. To look at a work of art is to engage with an idea, and that is not a one sided activity. It's more of a conversation."

A Portrait without Likeness will be accompanied by an illustrated publication featuring conversations between the artist and Chief Curator at the SNPG, Julie Lawson, who has curated the show, as well as contributions from Art Historian Dr Tom Normand and a new work of short fiction by Booker Prize-nominated novelist Andrew O'Hagan. Watt's conversations with all three during the gestation period of this body of work, has been important to its creation.

The exhibition opens at the Portrait Gallery on 17 July and will run until 9 January next year.

The exhibition will then travel to Inverness where it will be shown at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery from 29 January – 2 April 2022.

Alison Watt said: "I've been looking at Ramsay's portraits of his wives, Anne Bayne and Margaret Lindsay, for longer than I can remember. There is no doubt that these portraits are what first drew me to his work and I've looked at them intently over the years. It is not only exciting, but also a great privilege to show alongside his paintings at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery."

Christopher Baker, Director of European and Scottish Art and Portraiture at the National Galleries of Scotland, said: "This remarkable group of paintings take Alison's work in a new direction. Hovering between the genres of still life and portraiture, these beautiful new works use aspects of Ramsay's paintings for their starting point, but although they may have been inspired by the art of the past, this is a form of study that goes far beyond mere admiration or the modest hope, in her own words, 'that some of the greatness might rub off on me'. In the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Alison's

subtle responses to Ramsay's work create an extraordinary conversation between two exceptional Scottish artists."

Born in Greenock, Alison Watt came to prominence in the late 1980s whilst still a student at Glasgow School of Art (GSoA), after winning the prestigious annual portrait competition of the National Portrait Gallery in London. She has since exhibited widely, both nationally and internationally.

In 2000, she became the youngest artist to be offered a solo show at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (SNGMA) with her exhibition *Shift*. Watt later served for two years as the Associate Artist of the National Gallery in London, which resulted in her landmark exhibition *Phantom* in 2008. Her work resides in many significant collections, including the Uffizi Gallery, Florence; the National Portrait Gallery, London; the U.S. Embassy, London, the National Galleries of Scotland; the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Glasgow; the Arts Council Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery and the British Council.

A Portrait without Likeness will also display several rarely seen drawings of Ramsay's and one of his sketchbook archives. They will be exhibited alongside Watt's responses, made after spending time exploring Ramsay's archive of drawings and sketchbooks held at the Galleries.

In her works, Watt explores the idea of narratives forming around individual objects found in some of Ramsay's portraits of women. Commenting on her process, she said, "I've been considering the nature of portraiture itself; how we view it and what our expectations are of it. Looking at Ramsay's archive has acted as a conduit for that. I've become particularly interested in some of his portraits of women, and the different ways in which he has chosen to represent them; the objects they hold, their clothing and surroundings. And in particular, his use of lace, petals, ribbon and paper; small details which appear and reappear in his paintings. As the art historian Horace Walpole once said, "[Ramsay's work] ...is all

delicacy”.

“Since I first started looking at paintings, I’ve been interested in the objects of study of the great masters, both how they are portrayed and their significance. As a genre, the still life can be very intimate. It reflects us, so by its nature is linked to the portrait. It is in effect, a portrait without likeness”.

ALISON WATT:

A PORTRAIT WITHOUT LIKENESS

17 July 2021 – 9 Jan 2022

Scottish National Portrait Gallery

1 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JD

0131 624 6200 | nationalgalleries.org

(Thu-Sat from 1 July)

Admission Free | Advance booking required

#AlisonWatt