



February 19, 2026

Belvedere 21

Arsenalstrasse 1
1030 Vienna

Hours:

Tuesday to Sunday
11 am to 6 pm
Evening opening:
Thursday 11 am to 9 pm
Closed Mondays except
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Press downloads:

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Installation View Sue Williams. *WHAT NOW*, photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna

SUE WILLIAMS WHAT NOW

February 20 to June 7, 2026, Belvedere 21, upper floor

Belvedere 21 is pleased to present *SUE WILLIAMS: WHAT NOW*, the most comprehensive exhibition to date on American artist Sue Williams (*1954 in Chicago Heights, Illinois), offering a new perspective on an oeuvre that is both personal and political—radical, pointedly humorous, and abidingly relevant.

From 1997 to 1999, Sue Williams was a visiting professor and led the master class for representative painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her teaching activities and exchanges with a younger generation of artists in Vienna—including Katrin Plavčák and Sevda Chkoutova—form another backdrop to this exhibition.

Belvedere General Director Stella Rollig: *Sue Williams has created a body of work that is deeply personal yet also addresses intensely controversial social issues. Especially in today's global political climate, it is important to us to be a platform for feminist positions that uncompromisingly center on power structures, violence, and the conditions of freedom.*

Williams has been exploring gender relations, body politics, power, and oppression through the medium of painting since the late 1980s. Long regarded as a paradigmatically patriarchal domain, she navigates this field brilliantly using a variety of painterly strategies.

Curator Luisa Ziaja: *A constant in Sue Williams's oeuvre is her systematic questioning of the medium of painting and the conventions of figuration and abstraction, whose boundaries she is forever challenging. Humorously and unrelentingly, she navigates the fault lines of power and tells of structural violence, individual trauma, memory, and resilience.*

At a time when it seemed almost inconceivable that painting could be a feminist medium, Sue Williams resolutely chose to confront her personal experiences on canvas. Williams's early works showed scenes of everyday violence against women with unflinching anger and brought her fame almost overnight in the early 1990s.

Works such as *TRY TO BE MORE ACCOMMODATING* (1991) and *A FUNNY THING HAPPENED* (1992) combine brutal scenes with sarcastic, terse texts to create disturbingly unambiguous depictions that simultaneously lay bare the mechanisms used to silence survivors and trivialize their suffering. Meanwhile, in *THE ART WORLD CAN SUCK MY PROVERBIAL DICK* (1992), she takes aim at the patriarchal art industry, its long-standing dependence structures, and enduringly misogynous discourses.

From the mid-1990s Sue Williams radically changed her painting strategy: Text and narrative scenes became less important, while figures and body fragments on an often-monochrome ground took on a life of their own. Williams's interest in the painterly, the brushstroke, repetition, and tempo is unmistakable here and becomes a constant in her practice, even in later stages of her oeuvre. Her ironic adoption of the all-over technique of male-coded Abstract Expressionism gave rise to large-format, gesturally abstract compositions. Works such as *LOTS OF COLORS* (1997) and *MOM'S FOOT BLUE AND ORANGE* (1997) are characteristic of this period in which distorted body parts, reproductive organs, and fetishistically charged motifs emerge from the tangle of lines—visually appealing but by no means harmless.

Around the turn of the millennium, Williams's painting was dominated by the expressive and vibrant line. These seemingly "pleasant" lines and cheerful colors are soon revealed as ambiguous. Purportedly liberated from any reference to reality, physicality is intrinsic to the painterly gesture in *RED AND PURPLE DEAL* (2001)—the abstraction remains deceptive, with Williams deliberately confounding expectations of her painting. From the early 2000s onwards, Williams' increasingly detailed, ornamental all-over compositions explicitly respond to socio-political events such as the "War on Terror" proclaimed after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Paintings such as *HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION* (2006) and *LEO STRAUSS, THEORETICIAN* (2008) express states of political and psychological trauma in fragmented, organic pictorial forms.

In the 2010s Williams progressively associated global crises with personal loss and trauma. Her painting technique became freer, more expressive, more kinetic. *MINISTRY OF HATE* (2013) exemplifies this period in which fragments of text, architectural motifs—including the Twin Towers—and dynamic lines and explosions of color converge. Given her ongoing questioning of her medium, her most recent paintings, including *THE COSMOS ABOVE* (2023) and *PRESENT* (2025), can be interpreted as the synthesis of earlier stages of her oeuvre: On unprimed canvases grotesque, hovering figurations condense into dreamlike pictorial arrangements of recurrent motifs and topics.

Arranged chronologically, the exhibition *WHAT NOW* presents over one hundred works by the artist—paintings, drawings, collages, and select sculptures from every creative period—from the late 1980s to the present. It is in the simultaneity of the personal and the political, humorous caricature, almost shocking explicitness, and painterly gestures that Sue Williams's works unfold their compelling force. The succinct and stirring title conveys the deeply felt urgency of facing up to the realities of our present.

BIOGRAPHY

Sue Williams (* 1954 in Chicago Heights, Illinois) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She studied at the California Institute of the Arts (1972, 1975–76) and at the Cooper Union in New York (1973). In the early 1990s she reached a broader public with paintings and sculptures in which she openly and explicitly addressed structural violence against women. Both a solo exhibition at 303 Gallery in New York in 1992 and her participation in the Whitney Biennial in 1993 were crucial to her further reception, especially in the critical feminist discourse of the time. She participated in the Whitney Biennial again in 1995 and 1997. In 1993 Williams received a Guggenheim Fellowship. From 1997 to 1999 she was a visiting professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, teaching the master class in representative painting.

Since the late 1980s Williams has taken part in numerous international exhibitions, including at the Deichtorhallen Hamburg and Kunsthaus Zürich (1997), the Vienna Secession and the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (2002), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2018). Her works are part of institutional and private collections in the United States and Europe, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Ringier Collection, Switzerland.

Information about the supporting program and dates can be found at www.belvedere.at/programm

CATALOG

Sue Williams: WHAT NOW

Editors: Stella Rollig, Luisa Ziaja

Authors: Bice Curiger, Katarina Lozo, Katrin Plavčak, Stella Rollig, Barry Schwabsky, Nancy Spero, Sue Williams, Luisa Ziaja

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PRESS PHOTOS

Scan the QR code below for direct access to the press photos page, where pictures of objects and views of the exhibition can be downloaded for free for press purposes.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Sue Williams: WHAT NOW</i>
Curator	Luisa Ziaja
Assistant curator	Katarina Lozo
Exhibition architecture	Walter Kräutler
Exhibition graphics	Katarina Schildgen
Exhibition dates	February 20 to June 7, 2026
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Tickets	belvedere.at/en/go/tickets
Web	belvedere.at/en facebook.com/belvedere21 X.com/belvedere21 instagram.com/belvedere21wien #SueWilliams

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