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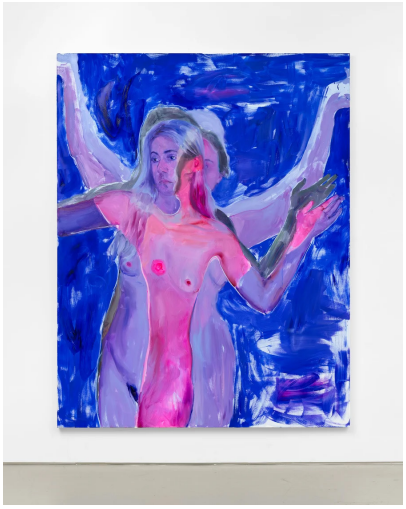
Jenna Gribbon’s Paintings of Her Wife Capture the Messy Boundaries of Intimate Relationships

Katie White

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Portrait of Jenna Gribbon, 2026. Photo by Shawna Ferreira.



Jenna Gribbon, *Kali*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.

When I meet the artist Jenna Gribbon, there is a painting of a blue-skinned, many-armed woman with a third, impossibly bright pink nipple at the center of her chest. At the center of the canvas is a recognizable figure for those familiar with Gribbon’s work: her wife, the musician Mackenzie Scott. Her form is overlaid with projections of Gribbon’s own naked body so that the two women appear fused together, resembling Kali, the Hindu goddess for whom the painting is named, the Divine Mother who presides over time, death, destruction, and transformation.

Gribbon has devotedly painted her wife for close to a decade, making her the central figure in exhibitions including her 2023 exhibition “The Honeymoon Show!” at Levy Gorvy Dayan. Now, in a new show at David Kordansky in New York, the artist shows her in a whole new way, no longer simply a muse but as a seemingly mythic being with whom Gribbon is entwined. It’s Kordansky’s first New York presentation of her work, on view through December 19th, and in it Gribbon reckons with the complexity and intimacy of perceiving those we are closest to. Though the artist has spent years painting her wife, she knows truly seeing and observing someone in the moment rather than working off of our ingrained assumptions can be tricky work. In Gribbon’s estimation, a person can be different between breakfast and lunch.

“There is the challenge of really seeing someone you’re intimate with. The closer you become, the harder it is to see them,” said Gribbon. “One of the greatest obstacles in seeing someone is not projecting yourself onto them. I’m literally doing that in this painting, though, showing what that reality feels like: trying to see someone but getting in your own way and seeing yourself instead.”

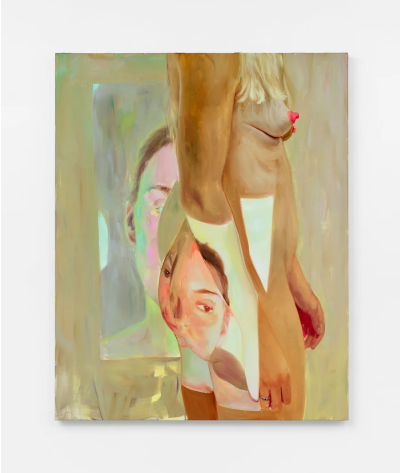
For the large-scale works in the exhibition, Gribbon used a film projector to superimpose photographs of her own body onto Scott’s, so that the resulting figures are both mythical and monstrous. A third eye opens on a torso in one painting, a two-headed woman appears in another. The projector has its own distinct effects on these images, casting blue tones and bands of color across their chimerical forms. The exhibition juxtaposes these larger-than-life paintings with a series of small-scale paintings in warm, natural tones. These paintings offer snapshots of the artist’s domestic life—a kitchen table, a small self-portrait.

In some ways, these images continue Gribbon’s practice: Scott has served as a muse and model for the artist for years. But now, Gribbon inserts herself into the picture, complicating her role as artist and viewer. The overt sensuality of Gribbon’s earlier work transmutes into something cooler and more cinematic.

How Gribbon paints two portraits as one



Jenna Gribbon, *Harpy*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.



Jenna Gribbon, *Hindsight*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.

These aren’t the first merged figures that Gribbon has painted. For her 2024 exhibition “Like Looking in a Mirror” at David Kordansky in Los Angeles, Gribbon painted a series of works fusing her likeness with that of her son.

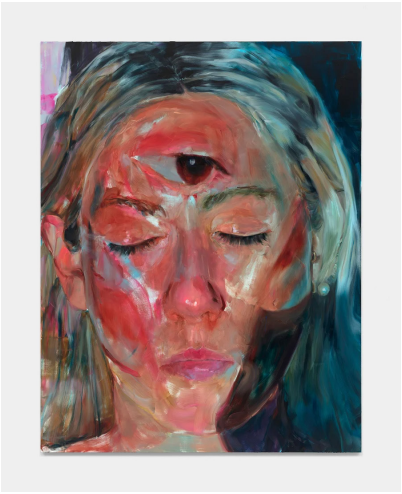
“It was this time in his life where he really looked like my twin,” said Gribbon. “It was this stage before his face masculinized. We had the same hair at the time, too. It was kind of crazy.”

In these paintings, Gribbon felt she was sorting out the boundaries between herself and her child. “I was projecting myself onto him to address the difficulty of parsing out where I end and he begins: what’s his and what’s mine, what’s learned, what’s inherited,” she said.

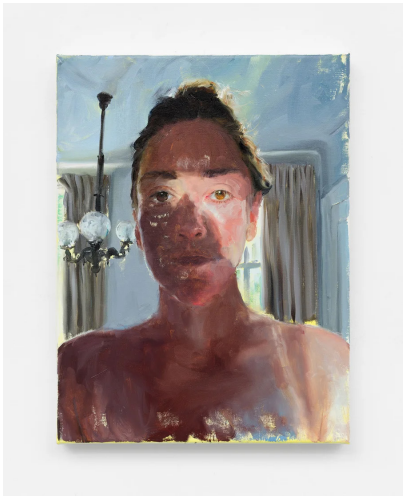
Her use of the projector came earlier. In a 2021 show at Sim Smith in London, Gribbon screened the films of Agnès Varda, letting the light of the films fall across the audience. Gribbon’s first projector-based paintings of Scott came recently, in the lead-up to her museum exhibition “Entwined,” Gribbon’s first solo museum exhibition, at the Rose Art Museum, on view through January 3rd. Three new works in the exhibition show Gribbon’s own face projected onto her wife’s.

To make these works, Gribbon first photographs herself, sometimes in front of a bright color. Gribbon projects those photographs onto Scott as she stands before another color. Gribbon then paints from a photograph of those two merged images. For Gribbon, this multistep process has opened her to new compositional possibilities. “That fracturing of the image and the color arrangement is a really fun painterly tool,” she said.

Lesbian merging and myths



Jenna Gribbon, *Steropes*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.



Jenna Gribbon, *Self, September light*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery

This merging of forms is, in some sense, one of Gribbon’s biggest fears. “There’s this idea of lesbian merging that has always been so scary to me,” said Gribbon. “It’s a trope that lesbians become one unit and lose their individual identity, becoming extremely enmeshed.” For Gribbon, a fiercely independent person, the idea felt frightening. In these works, she dives headlong into that anxiety and considers it from other angles. “What if we combine into something powerful or mythical? What if we get superpowers?” she said. Here, these fused forms appear like Janus, the Roman god of transitions, “a single entity that looks forward and backward,” in her words, or the many-breasted Artemis of Ephesus in another.

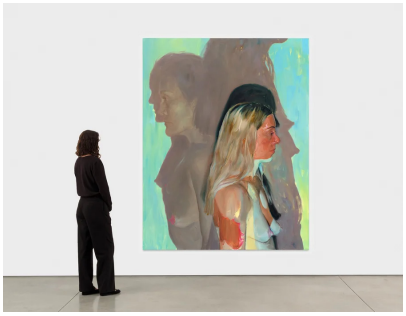
“Maybe in the combination, we can become greater than the sum of our parts,” she said of their combined forms. “We can combine into something more extraordinary or more interesting or more powerful than we have the ability to be on our own. She has so many strengths that I don’t have. And so in being partnered with her, I get to benefit from those strengths and she gets to benefit from my strengths.”

Viewers, Gribbon knows, often fixate on the nudity and sensuality in her works. “People get distracted by the pink nipples,” she said. Gribbon describes the images as being as much about romance as they are about perception. “They’re about asking questions about how we’re looking, how we’re given

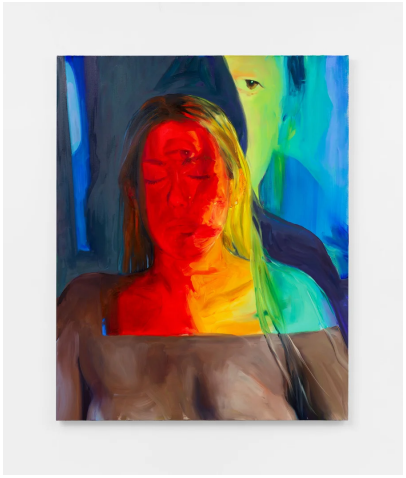
permission to look, how we’re supposed to look versus how we want to look,” she said.

The small paintings are more mundane in tone than the larger paintings, turning monsters back into familiar faces. The exhibition includes a rare small-scale self-portrait, painted from a mirror, which Gribbon describes as a moment of the couple “uncombining.” The painting showed Gribbon her own blind spot. “I feel like I’m painting a different person every time I make a painting of Mackenzie,” she said of Scott. But painting herself becomes something more complicated: “I can’t see my own evolution.”

Her influences



Installation view of Jenna Gribbon, *Artemis of Ephesus*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.



Jenna Gribbon, *Prescience*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery.

Throughout her career, Gribbon has bridged art historical influence, from Jean-Honoré Fragonard to Édouard Manet and Mary Cassatt, with contemporary figuration and cinema. For these works, she says she was thinking of French painter and writer Francis Picabia’s “Transparencies,” the layered, overlapping paintings he made in the late 1920s and early ’30s. Gribbon admires the irreverence and playfulness of these images as well as their strangeness.

This Surrealist impulse factors into how Gribbon imagines Scott, too. “I always kind of think of her as like *Alice in Wonderland*, like growing and shrinking. It’s like she drinks the tea and then she’s in the small painting and we’re back in our home, and then she eats the cookie and she grows into this like mythic beast,” she said. There are other art-historical narratives hidden in Gribbon’s paintings: for example, she often paints Scott wearing a pearl earring, a nod to Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (ca. 1665).

For Gribbon, these ever-evolving stories are all just new ways of seeing Scott. “Dedicating yourself to really seeing your partner is a very romantic thing to do,” she said. “But it’s also a time-based project about the way that we evolve as people. We are all sort of changing all the time, both inside and out.” ∎

Katie White