

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Jenny Saville

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[6:40]

**Jenny Saville, artist:**

Somebody wrote about my work recently and said it was like looking at life through a microscope and I thought, you know, like an enlarged area of life and I thought that's actually probably that's quite right that's probably what.

I'm childlike in that sense, you know, like the way a child will turn a stone over and look underneath the stone, I've got that impulse still and I cherish that I've still got I'm lucky enough not have had to grow up.

I am quintessentially figurative. I am rooted in figuration and actually, maybe it's not figuration, picture making. I am a picture maker, I'm an image maker. Even if I start completely abstract, which I do often, just throw loads of paint on a canvas, my instinct, my animal instinct is to make something of it you know not to let just have paint sensation but to make an image. And it's uh that acceptance of my nature that's kept me figurative I think, but I have a deep love of abstract painting so the painter's I like, like De Kooning, Pollock, Twombly, you know late Monet where they disappear and you know I love late Titian where they dissolve, things like that that's where I've learned how to be a painter. So I've learned about paint through them, but I haven't wanted to abandon the pursuit of the figure.

I've always cared more about a work being powerful than being beautiful. And beauty scared me, I would say. I was afraid that if it was beautiful, it wasn't serious or it was sentimental or something like that, that terrified me to go in that direction. And then I was in Naples and I started working with a blind woman called Rosetta.

Through that process of working with her, her beauty kind of came out. She had a lot of self-hatred and disgust about the way she was why would I possibly want to paint her, to feeling and exuding this incredible beauty and that journey became very powerful for me and for her. When I made the

painting, I allowed myself to access that beauty, and I think it's the first sort of beautiful picture I made, and so I realized that it was okay to do that,

I think there's an enormous shift in my work, and that came from actually growing a child inside my body. I'd spent my whole life trying to paint flesh, and I was painting flesh and growing flesh at the same time, and that was very powerful for me. I always say, my kids gave me back my freedom, artistic freedom. I had these two toddlers who were just going crazy on the kitchen floor with paint. You know sitting there just painting across the surface of the paper, this utter freedom. And I was like Woah, wait, I'm the artist here what's happening? I then started experimenting an awful lot more and going outside the lines and multiplying the lines and all of these different things and I just rode that wave for many years.

I often now start not knowing what I'm going to do other than it's probably going to be a group of figures and that's a really exciting way to work because you're on a journey that you just don't know and it's your creativity in the moment in the act of making that is your journey so I don't I don't like to have a fixed idea as much now, that that's the shift and I'm grateful for my kids because they've given me that. If I hadn't have gone through the process of having a child I think I wouldn't have been able to do that.

The piece *Aleppo*, comes out of a whole series of works that I've been working on for a few years now which I haven't shown yet. So that's the first piece I've released that has been really it's based around the Pieta. When I was doing the piece, invited to do a piece at the National Gallery it's actually one of the only site-specific pieces I've made so I didn't know it was going to go between those two Titians, that was that was a new development but I knew it was going in one of those rooms.

Obviously the relation with art history I thought, well, I'm working on this pieta series I think I'm going to do something to do with this anyway and I had a lot of images, I mean a lot a lot of images of war situations and they're so remarkably similar whether they're Rwanda, whether they're Bosnia, whether they're Iraq, Syria, you know that's maybe the colour of skin and the physiology changes a little bit, but the basic impulse is the same and we do this again and again as humans. We just blow buildings up, we kill each other, we have children that are dying in our arms and you sort of think, gosh, we're like, we just repeat this cyclic pattern. And I've got two children, so I felt very, you know, try to imagine what that would be like and it was actually very difficult

making the work, I had to divorce myself from the feelings that I had about if they were my children because that's quite painful to imagine and, but I knew it was very powerful and I wanted to do it.

Titian is important because I had an uncle who was an art historian, artist and he guided me all through my early life and so he would take me to see Rembrandt and take me to see Titian and Tintoretto and on all the kind of greats. He taught me that if you're gonna have heroes, make them very big, make them really good and if you don't ever think you're very good, because you only have to turn around and look at a Velazquez, or turn around and look at a great Titian. And that is your measure and you'd better work really hard because that's difficult because they are very good.

So I've always had them around me as a sort of, you know, a guide to keep working hard, to keep pushing, to keep trying to get the best out of something that I can do.

And so it's an incredible journey in my life to now sit between those Titians and have a dialogue and to see ok, I'm doing this and how does my work look in that context? And for the museum to give me the opportunity to do that has been very special.