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Drapery Isn't Just for Old Masters. How Contemporary Artists Are Reimagining an Ancient Motif

"Drop, Cloth" an exhibition co-organized by Hollis Taggart and Susan Inglett Gallery, dives into the ways drapery continues to evolve.

by Katie White • December 22, 2025



Beverly Semmes, *Bow (Blue Curtain)* (2016). Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery.

The devil is in the details, or, in the case of art history, the drapery. Just think of the elegant folds on the peplos of Greek caryatids or the fluttering peach mantle in Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1486), or the white clothes that mysteriously obscure the faces in René Magritte's *The Lovers* (1928). Drapery in art is as old as art itself, a compositional device used to frame subjects while allowing painters and sculptors to showcase their talents.

Now, a new exhibition, "Drop, Cloth," co-curated by Glenn Adamson and Severin Delfs, delves into the ways artists have reimagined drapery over the past 50 years. The exhibition brings together 30 works by 25 artists; the show is on view across two galleries, [Hollis Taggart](#) (through January 10, 2026) and [Susan Inglett Gallery](#) (through January 30, 2026) in Chelsea. The curation is a panoply of visions from Sam Gilliam's *Little Dude* (circa 1972), a seminal work, to recent creations by buzzy artists such as Kennedy Yanko, Jenny Morgan, and Chellis Baird.

Curator and writer Glenn Adamson was inspired to organize an exhibition by the work of his partner, the artist Nicola Stephanie, who, for the past two years, has been painting garments in ways that blur the space between two and three dimensions. "Nicola has done extensive research on historic painting involving drapery forms, and also had an interest in several contemporary artists, such as Catherine Murphy and Kennedy Yanko, who were pursuing parallel ideas," said Adamson. Soon he teamed up with Delfs, a director at Hollis Taggart, and the exhibition developed a wider lens.

The curators decided to incorporate "a diversity of materials and processes such as shaped canvas, paint skin, pliant ceramic, folded metal, handmade paper, assemblage, embroidery, and various types of weaving," according to Adamson. Susan Inglett was invited to collaborate soon after, known for her representation of artists who engage with textile forms, including Beverly Semmes, Greg Smith, and Martha Jackson Jarvis (all have work included in the show).

"Drop, Cloth" is inspired by ideas about drapery that date to the Renaissance. "Depicting fabric was a means of demonstrating painterly skill, introducing energy and movement, providing a malleable solution to compositional challenges, and signaling identity—all of which are important aspects of the works we've included in 'Drop, Cloth,'" said Adamson.

The earliest work in the exhibition is Nina Yankowitz's *Queen of Stars* (1969), one of a series of unstretched canvas works the artist made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her work is joined by works of her contemporaries, including Lynda Benglis, Sam Gilliam, and Rosemary Mayer, artists who merged the languages of painting and sculpture. "One of the significant aspects of these works is that they draw attention to canvas as an artistic material. What is conventionally a substrate takes center stage," explained Adamson.

Other works in the show, such as Greg Smith's *Now-Time-Forever-Void*, were made just this year. That conversation between works made at different points over the past half-century is key. "We were interested in tracing a lineage rather than presenting any single moment in isolation," said Delfs. "One of the most compelling throughlines is how artists use material itself as an active process of drapery, rather than simply representing cloth as an image.

One of the delightful surprises of the exhibition is Elaine Reichek's *Drapery Study (Michelangelo)* (2018), a hand embroidery based on a drawing by the Renaissance master. "By translating Michelangelo's painted drapery into hand embroidery, she collapses historical reference, feminist critique, and material experimentation into a single gesture—all while depicting cloth," effused Delfs. "In many ways, it distills the exhibition's concerns into one thesis statement."

Adamson, for his part, finds himself continually returning to Leslie Wayne's *Paint/Rag 73*, an oil on panel work that hovers between textile and painting; Wayne built up and sculpted oil paint into layered polychrome abstractions. Adamson described the work as "gorgeous to behold and evoking the gravitational falls of drapery in historic paintings, but also somewhat resembling a utilitarian cloth that you might find hanging on a studio wall."

"Drop, Cloth" marks the first collaboration of this kind for both Hollis Taggart and Susan Inglett Gallery, with, as gallery founder Hollis Taggart put it, "a single curatorial framework, one shared exhibition title, a joint catalogue, and two venues functioning almost as one extended space." Both Taggart and Inglett see the exhibition as a chance for both galleries to scale up without taking on additional expenses. "We are in a profession that should allow for and welcome outside-the-box thinking, particularly in this moment, with its bureaucratic challenges to all small businesses amplified by a generational shift in the art market," said Inglett.

For the curators, the exhibition is a timely reflection of the growing interest in both cross-generational and interdisciplinary exhibitions. "Painting edges into sculpture, textile and craft traditions enter into conceptual and art-historical dialogue," said Delfs, of this boundary blurring, "Bringing these works together across two nearby spaces allowed us to trace those overlaps clearly, and to situate contemporary concerns within a much longer lineage of artists engaging with cloth as both image and material."