

In Queer Art, There's a Time for Action and a Time for Languor

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Samantha Nye, Attractive People, Doing Attractive Things in Attractive Places - Pool Party 1, 2018. Oil on Canvas. 60" x 94 1/2". © Samantha Nye. Courtesy of the artist.

by Larissa Pham

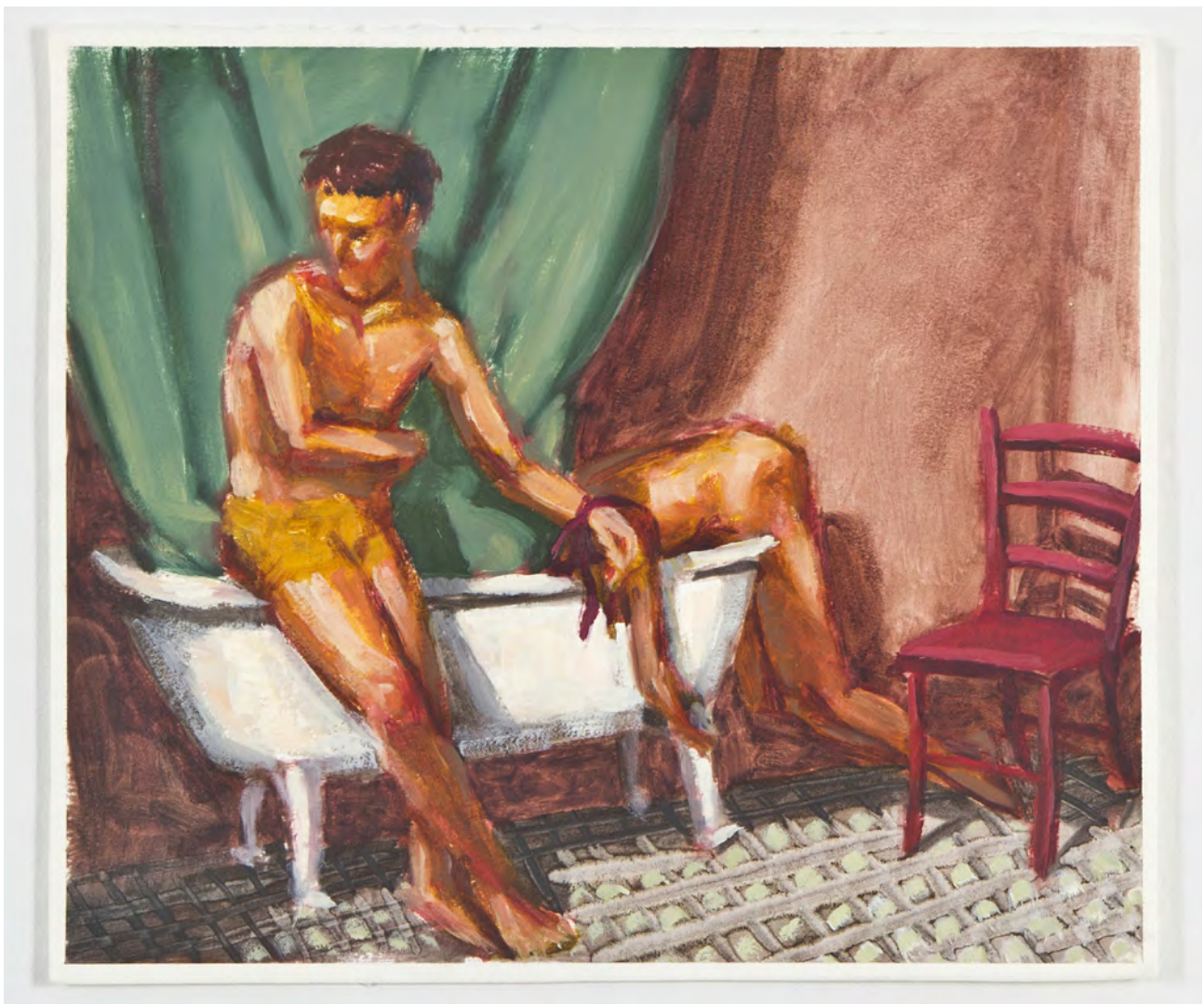
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An exhibition of four decades of work by queer artists surveys struggle, change, and the aesthetics of love.

Curated by artist and writer Stephen Truax, *Intimacy*, a group show at Yossi Milo in Chelsea, surveys four decades of queer art—over 70 pieces by 37 artists—to posit a connection between the AIDS crisis-inflected figurative art of the 1980s and the introspective work of today's younger queer artists. Yet in doing so, it opts out of

representing much of the political heavy-lifting that made room for tenderness to exist now, resulting in a mood that's a little less ACT UP and a bit more hazy summer in Fire Island.

There are a lot of languid bodies here, mostly nude, but where a sitter's languor in queer artists' work might have once suggested terminal illness, these days it comes from the pleasure of being loved and fucked. The greats of photography are well represented here—Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz (currently the subject of a retrospective opening at the Whitney on July 13), Robert Mapplethorpe—but Truax seems to have chosen their gentler works, displayed salon-style with up-and-comers like Paul Mpagi Sepuya and Elle Pérez (the latter's first solo museum show is now on view at MoMA PS1).



Hugh Steers, *In the Tub*, 1989, oil on gessoed paper, 11 1/4" x 13". © Hugh Steers, Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

Benevolence isn't a bad thing when the narratives of intimacy available to a community have long been entwined with death and pain. There are two paintings by Hugh Steers

from 1989 and 1992, with the first, titled *In the Tub*, showing a man keeled over into a bathtub. The other, *Two Men and a Woman*, is a vulnerable depiction of a male body being washed with care. It's a relief to encounter loving depictions of ordinary people, though, and the show, particularly in its curation of drawings and works on paper, revels in the kind of sensitive portraits one makes of a partner—two drawings by TM Davy are especially beautiful. It's wonderful to dwell in this kind of joy, like eating a Popsicle or standing under the misty rainbow of a sprinkler.

Identity is not solely arrived at through romantic or sexual connection though, but via a network of relationships, a community where material realities and dreams for a better future align. Being the only two in love can get lonely. There's a glimpse of one such utopian, communal future with painter Samantha Nye's *Attractive People, Doing Attractive Things in Attractive Places - Pool Party 1* (2018), a bourgeois to-do rife with nudity, but a fuller realization comes in *Lindsay's* (2016), a painting by Nicole Eisenman depicting a strange, sexy, crowded apartment, where two figures make love in a loft bed while nearby friends comfortably cook, conduct rituals, and take hits from a giant bong. It seems to be situated at the future end of this present moment, where intimacy can take many forms, and isn't reserved for the charged, taut space between those confined to pairs.

Intimacy is on view at Yossi Milo in Chelsea through August 24.