



ART

Hugh Steers

Feb. 18-Apr. 3

508 W. 26th St. Chelsea

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“Strange State of Being,” the title of Steers’s current show at Alexander Gray Associates, is how the painter described his mood in 1994, one year before he died from AIDS-related causes. He was just thirty-two. Most of the sombre, glowing canvases on view are portraits of other young men, seen vulnerably nude, or nearly so, at home and in hospital rooms. In “Sleeping Cat,” from 1988, the dark, curving form of the title’s feline is an anchoring void in the composition; a frail human figure, in either a feverish sleep or blinding pain, is tended by his lover, who, given the snake wrapping itself around his leg, seems stalked by illness himself. In other paintings, crows appear as tormentors or harbingers of loss. Such phantasmic visitations don’t undercut the unflinching realism of the artist’s figurative lexicon. Rather, they seem to elucidate another plane of existence, the “strange state” of delirium and foreboding in a surreal, but all too real, time of devastation.

—*Johanna Fateman*
