

YOSSI MILO



For Immediate Release:

London Williams: *Poetics*

June 26 – August 22, 2025

Artist's Reception: Thursday, June 26, 6-8 PM

Yossi Milo is pleased to announce London Williams' first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Poetics*, which opens to the public on Thursday, June 26, 2025. The exhibition will be on view in the West Gallery through Friday, August 22, concurrent with solo exhibitions by J. Carino in the East Gallery and Beck Lowry in the Qube.

London Williams (b. 1998; Milwaukee, WI) immerses his audience in a constructed world, where he posits a sartorial vision of a Black, queer utopia. Williams' multi-media act of fantasy is speculative, patchworked from domestic interiors that build a new space for him and his subjects to call home. The artist's realm unfolds room by room, inviting viewers to enter an elliptical world of parlors, dance halls, and dreams.

Poetics presents several monumental paintings by Williams that are stretched onto the walls by crystal-tipped upholstery pins. Depicted at near-life size, the figures inhabiting these works transcend their role as subject, becoming more akin to performers of a wordless drama. These works operate on the bodily scale of Renaissance paintings and religious murals, making use of the same relationship between subject and audience that inspires devotional awe or fear — here, inverted by Williams into tenderness. Many of the figures take their likenesses from the artist's community, especially of the ballroom scene of Pittsburgh, whose undeniable presence add to the poetics and emotional tenor of the works on view.

Interactions between Williams' subjects play out in semi-private spaces, sharing intimations of care and desire in glances and whispers. Clad in smart suits, cowboy hats, and high heels, these figures index a look that toes the line between masculine and feminine, taking their cues from the archetype of the dandy. Their polish signals their agency, an embodied act of esteem and resistance. The historic significance of poised, intentional presentation emerges through careful acts: tying one another's bow ties; exposing an undershirt; glancing sidelong under the brim of a hat.

Some of these works deliberately invoke a bygone era, rendered in a muted palette of graphite and burnt umber that recalls daguerreotypes or silver-plate photographs. These paintings take on the aged imperfection of vintage imagery, picturing a past rich with double exposures, cutouts, and collaged scraps. In imitating photography, these works implant a fictional memory, leaving a residue of the spectral energy Williams calls on in his work. This intentional patina is a testament to an invented past life — for a camera to have recorded anything, it must have been present.

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In its narrative capacity, Williams' work channels the undefined and subtle qualities of editorial spreads, taking cues from their staging, wardrobe, and the exaggerated acting of high-fashion poses. At the same time, the artist questions fashion photography's adherence to exclusivity—its sameness, whiteness, and class structure. The artist probes the conflicting relationship between iconography and life, relating it to his religious upbringing in the Midwest. Williams shares: "In Milwaukee, where I grew up, I saw Black congregations overseen by white angels." Ballroom, too, destabilizes the unattainable within fashion and glamour, animating bodies through *vogue* or granting a surname like Balenciaga, Mugler, or, as in Williams' own *kiki* house, Baby Phat. The reclamation of self-image through depiction is more than a motivation: it becomes a new identity unto itself. In his work's billboard-like scale and grand intention, Williams occupies and transforms space, and makes it his own and his community's.

Emerging in a flash of vivid club lighting, Williams' painting "The thought of the height of the heels he would wear to his fathers funeral," (2025) finds its subject alone, staring over his shoulder at the viewer as though the surface of the work itself were his mirror. His hand at his glittering ear, feet apart, he grounds his resolution in the height of his thigh-high boots, no different to the power found in blazers, slacks and ties elsewhere in the exhibition. Williams directs his models to channel their emotional states in their poses, which he reflects outwards into the paintings themselves. This encapsulates Williams' exploration of the Black queer psyche — in his own words, "the poetics of the *butch queen*." In having built a conceptual new home for these subjects, draws this practice away from pure depiction and towards fantasies of sanctuary.

A meta-narrative unfolds in Williams' work on the relationship between image construction and life. The amorphous settings of the artist's paintings are reminiscent of homes, clubs, and the proverbial studio in which they are made. Williams, like artists across history — from Diego Velázquez to Mickalene Thomas — shows the studio as a proscenium to the image, a subjective framing device for a vision at once imaginary and grounded. The artist views his own studio as a sacred space, wherein his fellow dancers and artists become archetypal muses, celebrated and written into a centuries-long painting tradition. Williams takes authorship over the ties between painting and life, crosses from fabulation to fabrication, and builds monuments to the butch queen.

London Williams' work has been exhibited at Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT; Platform Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA; Miller Institute for Contemporary Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Haw Contemporary, Kansas City, MO; San Dao Gallery, Wuhan, China, and DooSung Paper Gallery, Seoul, Korea. The artist is a 2024-25 activist with 1Hood Media Academy, Pittsburgh, PA; and a 2024-25 artist-in-residence with the Brewhouse Arts Distillery Emerging Artists Program, Pittsburgh, PA. Williams has received recognition through grants by the Pittsburgh Foundation, PA, and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, Montreal, Canada. In 2019, Williams was an Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in Photography at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO. Williams earned a Bachelors in Fine Arts in painting from the Kansas City Art Institute, MO, and a Masters in Fine Arts from Carnegie Mellon University, and lives and works in Pittsburgh, PA.

For more information, please contact Jack Cassou at 212.414.0370 or jack@yossimilo.com, or visit the gallery's website at www.yossimilo.com.

Image: *Travel tight and close; keep your brother in your hand*, 2024,
Oil on Canvas with Grommets and Upholstery Pins, 83 1/2" x 97 1/4" (212 x 247 cm)