

ArtSeen

Doron Langberg: *Likeness*

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The possibility of a queer visibility unfettered by ideas of representation is at the forefront of Doron Langberg's debut exhibition, *Likeness*, at Yossi Milo Gallery. The Israeli-born artist's large-scale canvases are occupied by sitters in demure postures as well as possibilities for a future and traces of the past, hidden in details that appear unfinished, and unrestrained. Langberg's subjects are friends who are acquaintances or lovers bonded with friendship from amongst the artist's own community—their presence bleeding into the canvas with both resilience and ethereality as they repose in nature or fervently have sex. They exist in contemplative and honest slivers of moments camera shutters might barely capture between a subtle smile or an abrupt utter; they don contemporary attire but they seem timeless, crowned with years of wisdom and the ardor of youth. Langberg orchestrates symphonies of figures, surroundings, and waves of abstraction in masterly concert, allowing each gesture to complement and elevate the others. Figures' limbs sprout into smears of paint, replacing a foot with a hazy smudge of pink or a hand with thick piles of red. His firm decisions to allow space for malleability manifest the painter's power over canvas, challenging figurative painting's yearning for completion. Claiming a territory of fluidity, he dares for open ends to depict bodies and experiences they carry.



Daniel Reading (2019), with its 96 × 80 inch dimensions and masterly handling of interior perspective, radiates a joie de vivre in a winding potpourri of colors, forms, and narratives permeating into one another, blossoming into possibilities of empathy and togetherness. A handful of figures are seen reading, lounging, and contemplating in fiery reds, oranges, and yellows, gathered around a tapestry that allows Langberg to push the limits of abstraction to near three dimensionality with thick piles of paint. Its loosely geometric patterns and the figures' submission to its grandiose presence imbue a sense of mystery, opening a portal to a dream-state, a territory of possibilities between past and present, here and there. To spend time in *Likeness* feels like taking a journey without a destination; there is a possibility for transformation that permeates the subconscious, leaving a sensorial sweetness. Following the paths of Langberg's brushstrokes gives viewers a sense of their moments of creation, to flashes of intimacy and empathy between the artist's gaze and his muses.

Langberg's connections with his subjects gives him the space to step into their personal lives and intimate moments, allowing the artist to render the figures stripped, physically and emotionally at smaller scale before transferring his interpretations to larger canvases. The most vivid evidence of this process is *Zach and Craig #2* (2019), which captures one figure devouring his partner's anus, a climactic celebration of gay pleasure, a genuine act that continues to define male bond and resists workings of heterosexual intercourse. Using his hand gestures at photographic pace, the painter grasps the ongoing intercourse, based equally on his perception and memory of his subjects' fleeting movements with his brushstrokes substituting for camera lens, both letting their bliss take its course and determinedly grasping fleshed intertwine with his hand gestures. A man bent on his knees pushes his face between his partner's spread-out legs, gently lifting his genitals to give and take; his partner's hazy expression of pleasure joins splashes of bright colors with which the painter surrounds his posers. An unabashed ritual of trust, desire, and relish coasts across the canvas, drenched in the bodies' sweat.

