

## AnOther

### The Seductive, Ecstatic Bodies of Artist-to-Watch George Rouy

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / CULTURE TALKS



George Rouy, *Flirting*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist

**Smothered Awake, the British artist's first show in Los Angeles, cements his status as a talent to watch**

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TEXT Lara Monroe

In between hanging his most recent solo show *Smothered Awake*, opening this Saturday at the Steven Turner Gallery in Los Angeles, British artist George Rouy explained his choice of title: “When I see the word smothered I think of suffocation, tension, death and the absence of something. The title suggests that in order to become ‘awake’ you need to go through some type of death.”

The engaging, unsettling and at times haunting qualities of Rouy’s figures have seen his work become increasingly visible within the international emerging art scene. Solo shows in London, New York and now Los Angeles, have come thanks to large-scale, vividly coloured paintings which are at once intense and intimate, depicting ecstatic figures which can barely be constrained on the canvas.

The six canvases in this latest show, created thanks to a residency held in London by curator Danny Lamb, are the artist’s largest to date. His signature swan with broken neck – “a symbol for confused masculinity; of the ego, sex, pain and silence” – accompanies the five other paintings that include groups of reclining figures – specifically, the couple – uncomfortably confined, compressed and interlocked.

“It is a digestible space,” he says of his canvas. “I do it more for me rather than anyone else. I have always enjoyed painting; it is the constant in my life. Ultimately, I made the decision that the work had to come from a genuine, honest and exposed place, before it gets abstracted through the dialogue of paint.”

While the painterly quality of his work initially appears to be that of an air brush, it is in fact the application and reworking of acrylic paint, a process he finds both inconvenient and satisfying at once. “It’s frustrating when you can’t get the colour you want and I’m very impatient,” he says. “I do look forward to it though, it’s a moment I get to sit down and mix large batches all at once.” These encompass a recognisable colour palette of lurid blues, violet, crimson and red, which for Rouy represent “strength, comfort and sex”.

Often cited for their primal, seductive and nihilistic qualities, the eccentric, amorphous bodies are placed in a context of perpetual transformation as they subvert definitions around gender, form and disposition.

# PERES PROJECTS



George Rouy, Black Swan, 2018 Courtesy of the artist



George Rouy, Don't Give Us the Morning, 2018 Courtesy of the artist

“I don’t think too much into the idea of painting as it reminds me of art school, which dulled everything,” he says. “The simplicity comes from me consciously trying to avoid drawing a figure in the way I was taught.”

Drawing influence from old masters and more recently the choreographer Sharon Eyal, Rouy examines the body as a tool for storytelling. “It’s very accessible and natural to engage with a pose in a certain way. I think the most beautiful thing in life is human interaction on all levels,” he says. “When I watch the performances of Eyal I see a completeness in feeling and purity, which is what I’m always trying to achieve within my own practice.”

On show until December, *Smothered Awake* signifies the artist’s capacity to deliver on a scale that ultimately compliments his aesthetic, while simultaneously reiterating his aim as an artist, “to transcend certain factors in my positioning as an artist, to feel that the work is forever genuine and expanding, but not refining”.

**Smothered Awake** is on at Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles until December 8, 2018.