

The approach



Anatomy of an artwork

Mike Silva's Tempa T: the politics of representation

The London-based Swedish artist paints the politics of representation in stark and understated tones

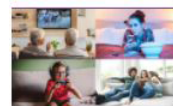
Skye Sherwin

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Body talk ...

This new painting is based on a photo from Vice magazine of the grime star Tempa T, known for the genre's early anthem Next Hype. Yet the artist, Mike Silva, goes beyond that stage persona. With the background stripped out, the focus is on body language: a legs-wide pose whose casualness is undercut by questions around how society responds to black men asserting their presence.



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Ordinary lives ...

In Silva's paintings the politics of representation are both very present and pointedly understated. Portraits sit alongside luminous still-lives and interiors where light breaks through windows on to half-empty shelves, record decks or the kitchen sink. These are rooms temporarily occupied by the short-life tenancy housing co-op the artist has long been a part of.

Pictures of you ...

Typically, the men Silva paints are those he has personally known: friends and lovers. These portraits start with a photo, snapped in the freshness of youth on his Pentax K1000 camera in the 90s and early-2000s. Occasionally, as with Tempa T, it's an image from an old style magazine such as Vice, those once unique storehouses of yesterday's music and fashion subcultures. The emphasis is on the fleeting and everyday, and its transformation through the labour-intensive business of changing the moment captured in a photographic image into the physical object that is a painting, which Silva creates by painting wet-on-wet.

Seize the moment ...

Using soft light, muted colours and quiet moments, the mood throughout all of Silva's work is both affirmative and gently mournful, for bygone times, places and the people we once were.

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