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BY FINN BLYTHE IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 24 JUL 23



Mike Silva Revisits Intimate Memories of Interiority

At The Approach, London, the painter brings domestic scenes and transient recollections into the light



The figure of a man peeps out from beneath a mass of bedding that fills the frame. Turned away from view on the far right of the canvas, his face burrowed into the duvet and one arm resting on the pillow next to him, *Gary* (all works 2023) appears to be sleeping. Unlike almost all the other canvases on display in Mike Silva's 'New Paintings' show, *Gary* has no visible window. However, its presence is unmistakable: sunlight floods in, transforming the duvet into an abstract topography of ridgelines and crevices, with bleached spots of brilliant white that fade into gloomy shadow. The painting's positioning heightens its drama: hung perpendicular to the gallery's double sash windows, the direction of light in the image aligns with that in the room.



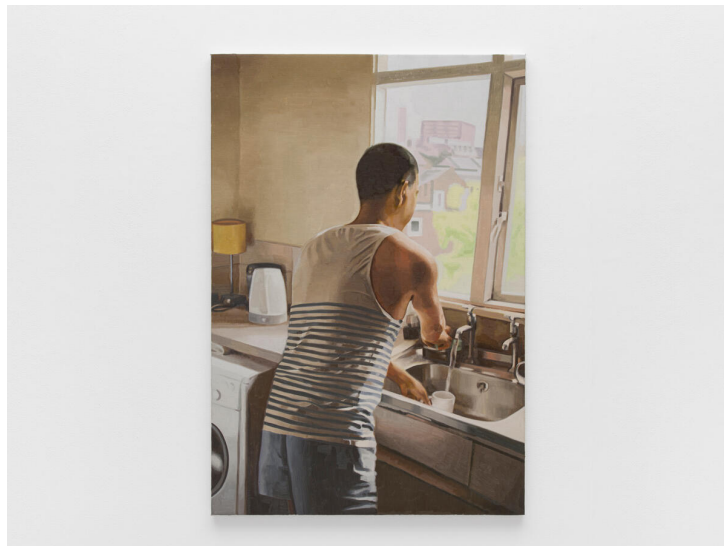
Mike Silva, *Gary*, 2023, oil on linen, 101.6 x 137.2 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London

The show also contains three figurative studies, including *Drawing of Gary*. The timeless interplay between light and dark is at the heart of Silva's meditative practice, which fuses classical approaches to still life and portraiture painting with personal narratives via an archive of source photographs taken over the last three decades. The resulting works emerge as snapshots from the artist's memory: domestic interiors and flashes of former lovers. These almost-filmic glimpses tell only fragments of stories.



Mike Silva, *Drawing of Gary*, 2023, Polychromos pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London

Silva's windows act as psychological thresholds between interior and exterior worlds in scenes redolent of works by Dutch Golden Age artists, such as Pieter de Hooch and Johannes Vermeer, as well as by 20th century painters including Vilhelm Hammershøi and Edward Hopper. Painted from the inside looking out, Silva's canvases suggest the place on the other side



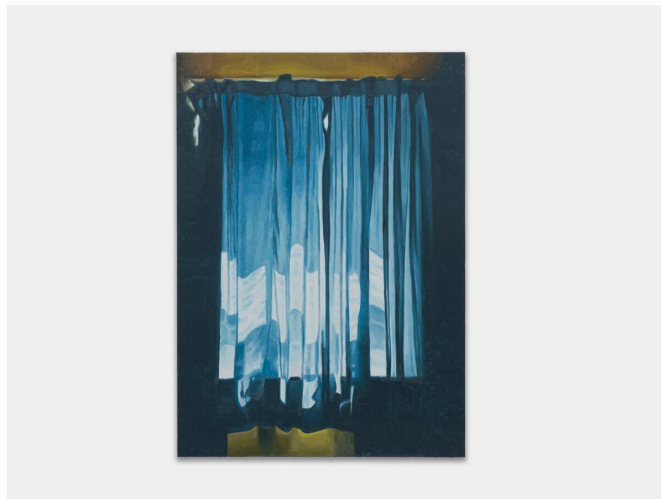
Mike Silva, *Red*, 2023, oil on linen, 111.8 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London

Insulated from the outside world, the figures in these paintings exist in the privacy of their own domestic sanctuaries – seemingly by and for themselves – going about their everyday tasks with a sense of intimacy and casual familiarity. In Silva's interiors, soft light falls on the clutter of household paraphernalia, bestowing the quotidian with a transcendental



Mike Silva, *Window*, 2023, oil on linen, 81.3 x 61 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London

Silva charges his works with the subtle melancholy of moments already lost. The solitary, outmoded fax machine in *Window*, for instance, reveals the age of the source photograph. The artist's generous and masterful use of white imbues each scene with a haziness that engenders the instability of memory. At the same time, curtains drawn partially – or entirely – over windows, are equally suggestive of movement and transience. In *Curtain* and *Owen's Room*, they operate as paradoxical mechanisms of concealment and revelation, alerting us to the possibility that something else is yet to be uncovered.



Mike Silva, *Curtain*, 2023, oil on linen, 106.7 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London

Overt political symbols remain absent from Silva's paintings, despite his documented commitment to social action, including anti-fascist activism and squatting. Instead, his works have a subdued, reflective aura and carry no bold statements, offering a counterpoint to the punk-fuelled non-conformism of the artist's youth. These soft interiors suggest the quiet repose of the morning after or the salve of a shaft of sunlight as it streams through the bedroom window. By carefully balancing light and dark, interior and exterior, past and present, Silva attempts to reconcile photography with memory and, ultimately, transience with loss.

*Mike Silva's 'New Paintings' is on show at **The Approach**, London, until 5 August.*

Main image: Mike Silva, Michael's Desk, 2023, oil on linen, 76.2 x 111.8 cm. Courtesy: the artist

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FINN BLYTHE

Finn Blythe is a writer based in London.