

Sam Lipp,
Press



DRAGGED, DEGRADED PAINTING-BODY

pavement paints the
present moment

Sam Lipp, *Tyranicides*, 2025. Courtesy of the Artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Eva Herzog.

Era Journal, 2026

The work of Sam Lipp comprises painterly—lush and gestural—visions of the erotic, queer and digital being. *Base* puts forward the most recent iteration of the artist’s investigation of modern—urban and online—sexuality and media circulation. The small-scale paintings, seducing the eye with their sweeping brushwork and crisp colour, depict sentimental, snapshot-like episodes of intimacy. The works play out a transient erotic beauty—the kind found in home-video footage (I’m thinking of the 2023 Pamela Anderson documentary): over-exposed, zoomed-in, shaky. Indeed, the artist contextualises his formal interests as reminiscent of the mechanical functions of old-school recording equipment. Lipp’s vision is a nostalgic one—we could go as far as to deem it “quaint”. The contemporary reality of image production that Lipp testifies to questioning is no longer so low-res;

really, the most mundane digital media we encounter is as polished as ever (specifically, AI-generated content). In all crudeness, we are faced with a painting—itsself a reproduction of a digital image, in the context of Lipp’s practice—of an erotic motif mimicking a retro film still. What, then, justifies its appeal to the present moment at-issue? For contemporary conditions of love and technology are so “high-res” that the retraction to such subtle means of portrayal appears to go against the artist’s conceptual preoccupation with the current media flux. Put simply, the relation between retro-nostalgia and a self-reflexive image—intended to stand in for the most acute awareness of the modern condition, of capitalist and *libidinal* economies, per Lipp’s self-advertisement—seems to have run its course in art.



Sam Lipp, *Star*, 2025. Courtesy of the Artist and Soft Opening, London.

Era Journal, 2026

Era #22 , stat!



Sam Lipp, *Censer*, 2025. Courtesy of the Artist and Soft Opening, London.

The philosophical implications of reproducing uniquely digital properties through the medium of painting are robust and potent; here, the titan of the industry that inevitably comes to mind is Gerhard Richter, born some fifty-seven years earlier than Lipp. The “slowing down” of digital images, otherwise circulated and consumed with enormous speed, through their faithful reproduction in painting makes for compelling commentary, however familiar. What’s more, Lipp’s paintings are screwed onto gallery walls, as if in an effort to keep them from slipping away. However, the current climate of popular media, which the artist claims to be thinking through, is not governed by the film camera or the cinema screen, to state the obvious. The body of work brought together in *Base* is a significant departure from Lipp’s preceding output. His earlier career has, most prominently, featured Grindr-style compositions in the nude, painterly experiments with the Getty Images watermark and an artistic obsession with Michael Jackson’s mugshot. It is the artist’s recent turn to the archival past life of the digital image that is of concern: he looks away from the tacky present moment of our screens to the glorified past of the 35mm era.

The trademark of Lipp’s steel-plate paintings—perhaps the most life-affirming element of his vocabulary—is the technique of “frottage”. Coined idiosyncratically by the artist, himself a queer New Yorker, the term has an amusing double meaning: a) referring to the process of putting a sheet of paper over a textured surface and producing an imprint with a crayon; b)

dry-humping, in homosexual sex slang. Lipp’s process involves fastening painted steel plates onto a chain and dragging them through paved city streets, allowing finished works to rub against the pavements. This way, the painted bodies are made to experience the vulnerability and brutality that the living ones are up against as they occupy the space of the metropolis. Frottage culminates in intricately textured slashes, coming to make up dynamic systems of lines that compliment—by disrupting—Lipp’s neat painterly gestures. It is a fresh way of translating themes of embodiment that transgresses the painterly medium and the limits of symbolic/discursive possibilities it presents; the art object is staged to engage with the urban environment as a substitute for the human body. The tactile interest—the invitation of the stroking, scrutinising gaze—that the painting’s surface gains materialises the play of ideas on the complications of modern sexuality and its satisfaction. Critic Asa Seresin remarks: “The marks left by the abrasion simultaneously resemble the remnants of an incompletely erased idea, the grotesque elegance of self-harm scars [...]”. Lipp’s frottage lines serve as evidence of the artwork’s degraded existence while displaying a sensual knowingness. These marks aren’t remnants of punishment, rather of relief, of satisfaction. These contradictory terms of description, at last, pragmatise the work to fit the pressure of both the romantic and artistic contemporary moments. For the “degraded” and the “pleasurable”, just like “grotesque” and “elegant”, represent the present best in conjunction.

by Sofiia Nikiforova

Frieze, 2026

Profile: For more than a decade, Sam Lipp has questioned what it means to picture flesh, desire and damage in paintings where the image itself becomes the body *by Shiv Kotecha*

SAM LIPP

Frieze, 2026



meet the painter Sam Lipp in his studio, on the seventh floor of a building in Chinatown, New York. Outside, screeching trains run in both directions across the Manhattan Bridge, concentrating the hum of life in the city into the splitting din of metal on metal. Inside, we talk at length about a new suite of paintings by the artist for his solo exhibition later this month at London's Soft Opening. Arranged in a tight row like frames in a filmstrip are a series of steel panels, each in a different stage of completion, or maybe transformation. A few are coated with primer; others feature thick strokes of oil paint that have started to resemble faces – one with a cigarette in mouth, another looking breathless, if not faint. The remaining few canvases are undergoing other processes entirely, as if the paint on them has recently been sandblasted off or begun to flake, like the surface of a blister. Four screws fasten each of these panels to the studio walls. 'My work is about formalizing the condition that positions any one subject in space,' Lipp tells me. 'The screws are the condition here. They support the paintings, and so they're also part of its composition.'

For the last decade, Lipp has used industrial tools and materials to make a body of work that disrupts the gaze with which we experience the effects of both paint and substrate. In works like *Sleep* (2016), steel wool is used in lieu of a paintbrush on a sheet of foamcore to produce a dense spray of pointillism that mimics the sheen of inkjet printing – its surface looks like it might crumble if touched. In other works, such as *New York Doll* (2023), tears and scrapes made on the steel backing by dragging it along asphalt complement the lattice of pencil marks with which the artist has drawn a torso. Lipp's images, which often feature parts of the human body from sources either found or produced himself, fracture their subjects' cohesiveness, as a glitch does to a display of pixels or as concrete does when it scrapes your knee. 'I want to represent the experience of being part and parcel of the tyranny of images,' Lipp remarks of the broken world his images make up, in which flesh is parcelled out as flatness and the figure looks pretty much like the ground.

Previous page
19 years. Sculptor.
Criminal association.,
2024, oil on steel,
spray paint, screws,
74 × 58 cm. Courtesy:
Bonny Poon /
Conditions;
photograph: LF
Documentation

This page
Flood, 2025, oil on
steel, spray paint,
screws, 33 × 43 cm.
Courtesy: the
artist, Soft Opening,
London and Derosia,
New York; photo-
graph: Eva Herzog

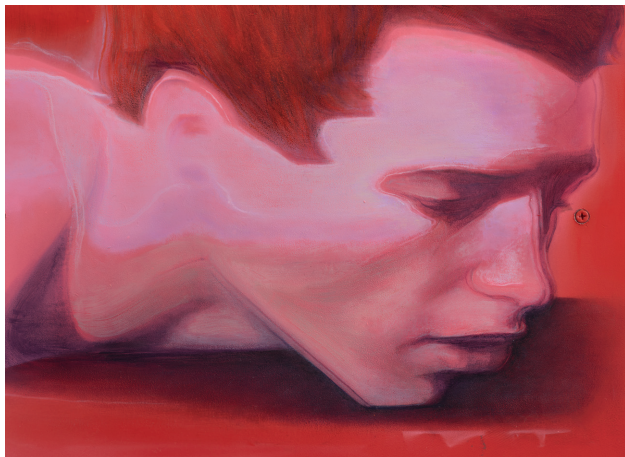
Opposite page
New York Doll, 2023,
pencil and frottage on
steel, 91 × 61 cm. Unless
otherwise stated, all
images courtesy: the
artist and Derosia,
New York

I want to represent the experience of being part and parcel of the tyranny of images.

Sam Lipp

Lipp talks about his sustained interest in simulating a material debasement of the image, and the precarious materials with which he enacts this fixation. 'This desire I have for producing things artificially is perhaps an intuitive and honest response to growing up amid the aesthetic milieu of Northern California,' he says. Lipp, who was born in London but grew up in Napa, remembers how 'everything around me was painted to look as if it were a villa in Tuscany.' Using acrylic and watercolour paint as a child, then later experimenting as a teen with oil, was a memory that came to him easily. This is perhaps because the activity channelled a more complex node of feeling – say, that of a small pleasure suddenly rendered as shame, which we tacitly agreed may have had something to do with his growing up queer. 'Painting allowed me to be weirdly creative and expressive, and at the same time was something secretive – I could be expressive but simultaneously mortified of the expression.' An early art teacher who opened her home to a pre-teen Lipp introduced him to calligraphy, 19th-century French drawings and prints and the surrealism of René Magritte. He attributes his interest in using foamcore to his father: 'It's what my dad would have my art mounted onto as a kid. It had this informal, colloquial method of presentation that, at the time, I wanted to emulate in my paintings.'

Lipp left California to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied sculpture and experimented with video, only returning to paint at the end of his college years – in part, he recalls, as a response to his instructors' dismissal of the medium. In the years after graduating in 2012, Lipp co-founded and directed the gallery Queer Thoughts, known as QT, with his then-boyfriend, the artist Luis Miguel Bendaña. The gallery began in the couple's apartment in Chicago, inside the walk-in closet attached to their bedroom, which had its own entrance onto the street. Before long, they were prompted to 'bring it to New York', as he tells me – which they did in 2015. Their Tribeca space, above which Lipp had his own studio, exhibited artists like Puppies Puppies, David Rappeneau, Ser Serpas and Diamond Stingily early in their careers. QT closed in 2023. 'There was always a finite timeline on the gallery,' Lipp reflects, 'I never intended to become an art dealer.'



Frieze, 2026





Throughout this time Lipp continued to paint, applying his steel wool technique onto materials such as linen (*Cruelty*, 2014), paper (*Looking*, 2015) and foamcore, as in *A Cobblestone* (2016), in which the skin of a shirtless man's smooth body becomes a landscape of brittle spackle. 'Truthfully,' Lipp confesses, 'no one wanted to buy those, and you can only do certain things that people say no to for so long.' In 2018, Lipp made a hard turn away from painting on these soft or cumbersome bases and began painting on salvaged steel, a move that suggests that Lipp's material motivations are less about the annihilation of the image than the ability of any one image to withstand the temporal effects, both fast and slow, of being in the world. 'What I'm doing is very specifically painting,' Lipp insists: 'Paintings about images that continue to refer outside of themselves.'

In Lipp's more recent work, the painted images themselves become the substrate for other kinds of mark-making. Lipp uses the word 'frottage' to describe the act of tying his paintings to a chain and dragging them across the road. In the context of drawing, the word refers to the technique by which paper is held against a textured surface and marked with a drawing medium

**The effect of these works
is less a spark of arousal
than an exhaustive
reckoning with a sudden
sense of loss.**

Shiv Kotecha

Frieze, 2026

to produce an imprint. In the context of sex, it means cock-on-cock foreplay. Both meanings suggest that Lipp views these abrasive treatments less like a punishment and more as a movement necessary for mutual satisfaction. In works such as *Superstar* (2023), a man's headless torso is encased by the exposed, ragged borders of the steel support. Lipp's brushstrokes, which render the figure's firm pectorals, clenched abs and star tattoos in steak-like shades of white, pink and red, are mottled by the road against which the image was rubbed. It might be tempting to situate Lipp's paintings, specifically those that source images of men's bodies from pornography or dating apps like Grindr, as exercises in the nude. But they can also be read as part of a particularly gay figurative canon, though here the sexuality in which they are steeped feels minor in relation to the textures of industrial ruin and rot that Lipp's canvases so carefully regulate. The effect of these works seems to me less like the spark of arousal and more like an impairment or an exhaustive reckoning with a sudden sense of loss.

The works that comprised Lipp's 2019 exhibition 'Incest' at Paris's Bonny Poon gallery, specifically *2746782FH008_jacko_po* (2019), clarify this conceptual underpinning of Lipp's practice. Slightly larger than a sheet of legal paper, the painting, in oil on steel, captures the mugshot image of Michael Jackson – taken in November 2003 by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department – after the pop star was arrested on multiple counts for allegedly molesting a child. If you were alive then, you'll have seen it: Jackson, wearing a pressed white shirt and set against a mute blue backdrop, looks absolutely agog in the face of the camera's flash. Lipp's version isn't sharp. Jackson's edges are left soft and blurry, because Lipp painted from the cheap rendition of the state-owned original, which had been sold to the commercial archive Getty Images, only to be sold and resold ad infinitum. Naturally, the painting also includes the image bank's familiar watermark, a dull grey banner that swipes in from the right side of the frame across Jackson's pursing lips. Lipp's painting refers not to the pop star or the scandal surrounding him, but to the arbitrary profit margins accumulated by the image as a result of its being deemed public property. 'I wanted to monumentalize that image somehow,' Lipp says of Jackson's mugshot; 'everything inside that image is about the circumstances that created it.'

The mugshot is a genre of photography that imitates the portrait, inverting the originating scene of recognition into a printed handout that can then be used for purposes of identification, circumscription, news or entertainment. It stages a scene that is reduced to the registration of sin; it screws the 'criminal' into the historical record and traffics it into the world by way of an image licence. The genre is a natural extension for Lipp and since 2019 has become an ongoing motif in his work. 'Camp as Paradigm', an exhibition at Toronto's Bonny Poon / Conditions in 2024, included historical photographs, again pulled from Getty Images, of several unnamed individuals who were likely among the first seated subjects of Alphonse Bertillon, the 19th-century French police officer and criminologist who invented the modern mugshot: *29 years. Day laborer. Anarchist. Vagabond* (2024), reads the title of one work. Another,

Opposite page
Tyrannicides, 2025, oil
and enamel on steel,
frottage, screws, tape,
58 × 74 cm

This page
A Cobblestone, 2016,
acrylic on foamcore,
46 × 28 cm

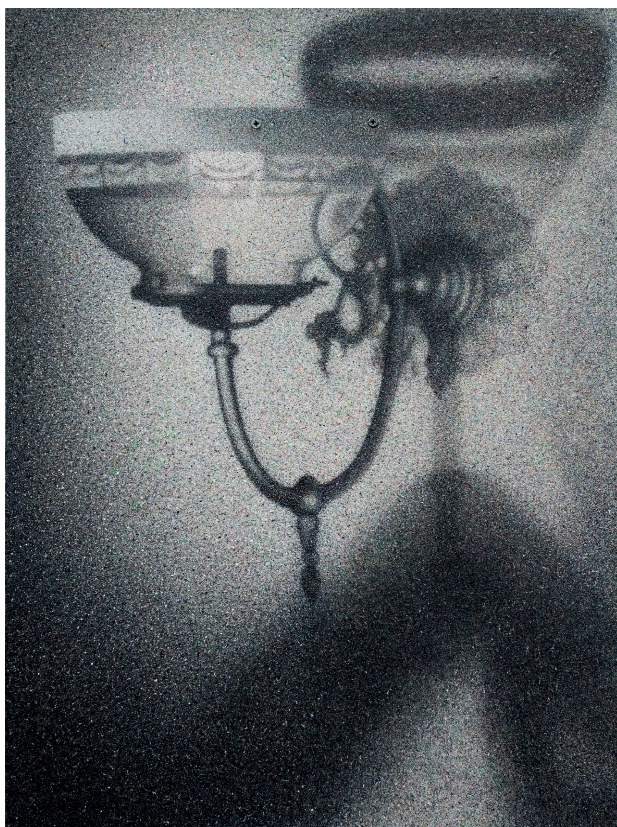


This page
Gaslight, 2021–22,
oil and prismatic
film on steel,
screws, 74 × 53 cm

Opposite page
29 years. Day laborer.
Anarchist. Vagabond., 2024,
oil on steel, spray paint,
screws, 74 × 58 cm

**I want to be the
renderer and have the
models act as
if they were actors
in a script.**

Sam Lipp



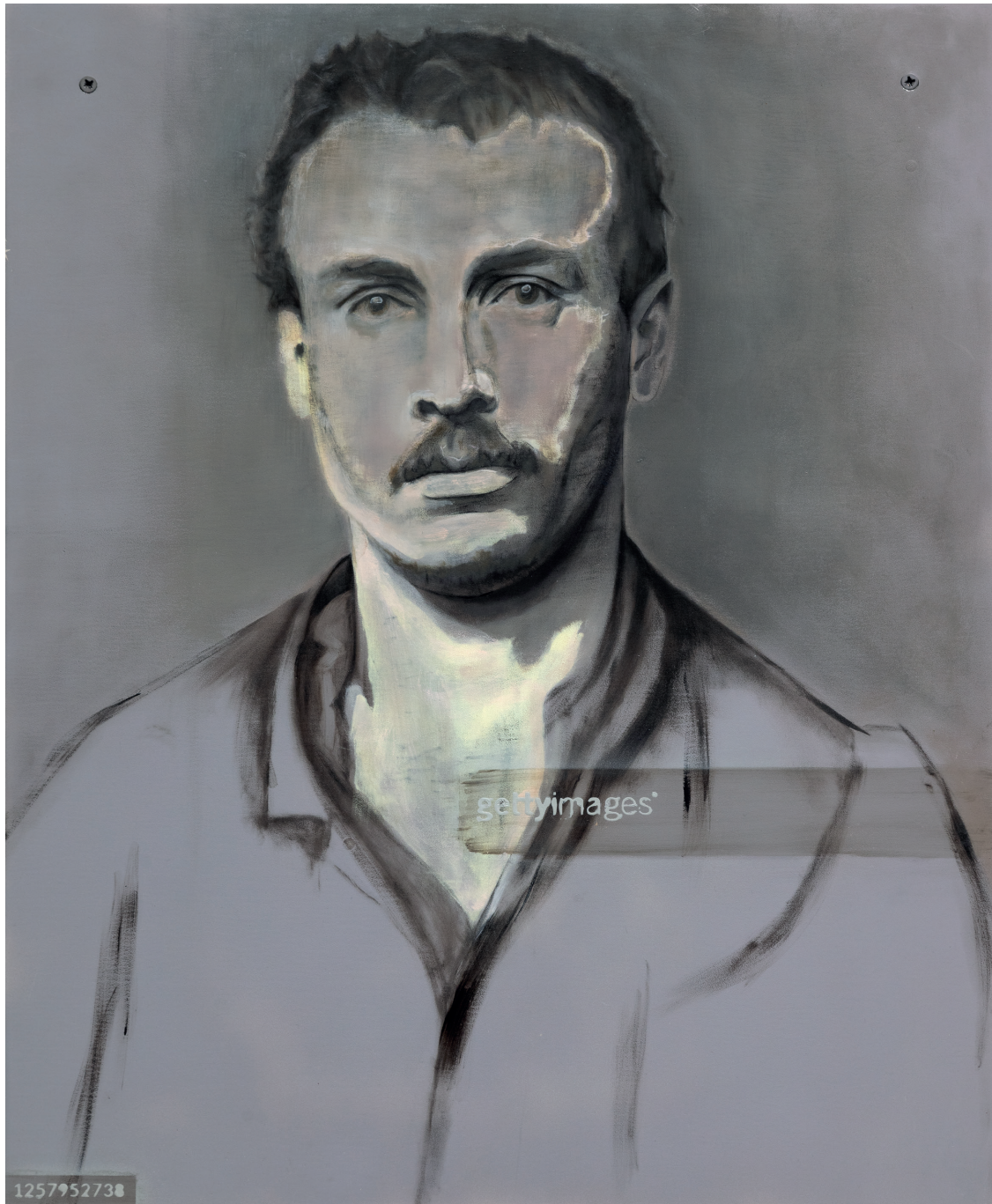
19 years. Sculptor. Criminal association (2024), depicts a woman who deigns to turn her head and look away from the camera. She breaks from the frontal, anthropometric posture authorities would likely have instructed her to take, refusing, however slightly, the part of ‘criminal.’

In his book *Notes on the Cinematographer* (1975), film director Robert Bresson rejects the flesh-and-blood theatrics of the stage show in order to develop a theory of the elemental components that give soul to the flat, mediated flicker of the cinematic frame. He writes of the derisive attitude he holds towards ‘acting’ and to the category of ‘actors’, favouring instead the drained expressions of non-professionals, whom he calls ‘working models, taken from life’. He instructs the cinematographer to ‘Reduce to the minimum share [the model’s] consciousness [...] Tighten the meshing within which he cannot any longer not be him and where he can now do nothing that is not *useful*.’ I could not help but think of Bresson’s non-actors while speaking to Lipp about his in-progress works which, rather than taking found images as their source, emerged from a series of in-studio photo shoots with a cast of hired models. One painting is of a man whom the artist cruised on the street and invited up to his studio: ‘He’s from Flint, Michigan, and I didn’t realize it at the time, but he was a drifter,’ he says. Several other models were cast by Lipp’s boyfriend. For each, Lipp provided his actors with a slim sketch to work from – so as to retain the rich ambiguity, perhaps, of the young sculptor and criminal associate of his earlier works. ‘I want to be the renderer and have the models act as if they were actors in a script,’ Lipp tells me, using the scene of his studio as a place for his models to rehearse any number of gestures or approximations rather than fix themselves to a ‘role’ for some kind of final take. (Once again, Bresson: ‘Model. Two mobile eyes in a mobile head, itself on a mobile body.’)

Freed from whatever arbitrary confines might limit a director to the specifics of instruction, and actors to some prefigured understanding of character, the scene I imagine taking place reduces both to something more elemental, like the light that’s used in any film or photograph to emphasize the surface effects of a setting, and where the expressions of people might start to resemble the blankness of a wall, prop or fixture. ‘I want to perform the idea of making content,’ suggests the painter, who, from where I’m looking, longs to stand in where an actor might, too ●

Shiv Kotecha is a writer and editor. His books include *EXTRIGUE* (Make Now, 2015) and *The Switch* (Wonder, 2018). He is co-editor of the pamphlet series *Cookie Jar* for the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant.

Frieze, 2026



Wallpaper*, 2026

ART AND CULTURE ▶ EXHIBITIONS & SHOWS

'I have always been interested in debasement as purification': Sam Lipp dissects the body in London

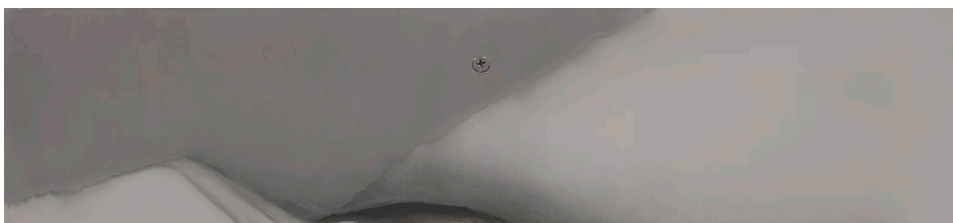
Sam Lipp rethinks traditional portraiture in 'Base', a new show at Soft Opening gallery, London

BY EMILY STEER PUBLISHED 3 DAYS AGO IN FEATURES



Sam Lipp's paintings are intensely physical. The US artist places the viewer in intimate proximity with the body, through a mix of portraits, cropped torsos and close-up views across bare shoulders. He ruptures his works' surfaces using destructive methods, encouraging their steel bases to rust, dragging them across concrete pavements with chains, and fixing them to the wall with crude screws. For 'Base', his new show at east London's [Soft Opening](#), Lipp presents a series of works in three main colourways, moving from bloody reds through to grey and hyper-exposed white, playing with old film and digital image aesthetics.

'It's the first time I've been this methodical,' he tells Wallpaper*, speaking ahead of the show opening. This series of work began with two small, exhibited test pieces, 'Crying in [Paris](#)' and 'Vagabond'. While carefully thought through, the apparent immediacy and experimental marks of these paintings have fed into larger works in the exhibition. A central piece, 'Tyrannicides', shows two faces with open mouths moving together passionately as their shoulders disappear into a mass of scratches and white exposure. The [painting](#) is drenched in fiery tones. Its oil elements, which sit over airbrushed spray enamel, were applied in a single day.



Wallpaper*, 2026



Sam Lipp, Star, 2025

(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography Eva Herzog)

Whether showing himself, live models, or figures from found images, Lipp's paintings all reflect his inner world to some degree. 'When I decided to drag a piece for the first time, it was based on my emotional state,' he tells me. 'I continue to have a desire to destroy what I create, projecting my emotions and personality onto the image. Shame, guilt, joy, passion... The dragging and rusting have a wildness and uncontrollability to them, but I'm learning how to manipulate them.'

When painting other people, Lipp has used everything from found mugshot imagery, to pornography, and encounters with mutual friends. 'There is always a relationship to film and theatre,' he says. 'It's like working with actors. There are tangible limits and implicit limits and responsibility; when I'm portraying someone else's face there are so many complexities.'

He looks for some kind of attraction towards the figures he paints from life, focusing on faces that express a subtlety of feeling or individuals who hold a compelling presence. By the time their image reaches its final state, it has

Wallpaper*, 2026

often been cropped or slashed to remove some recognisable elements. While his works are rooted within the self-image curation and bodily marketing of our contemporary image world, they reject the clean flatness that often defines it.

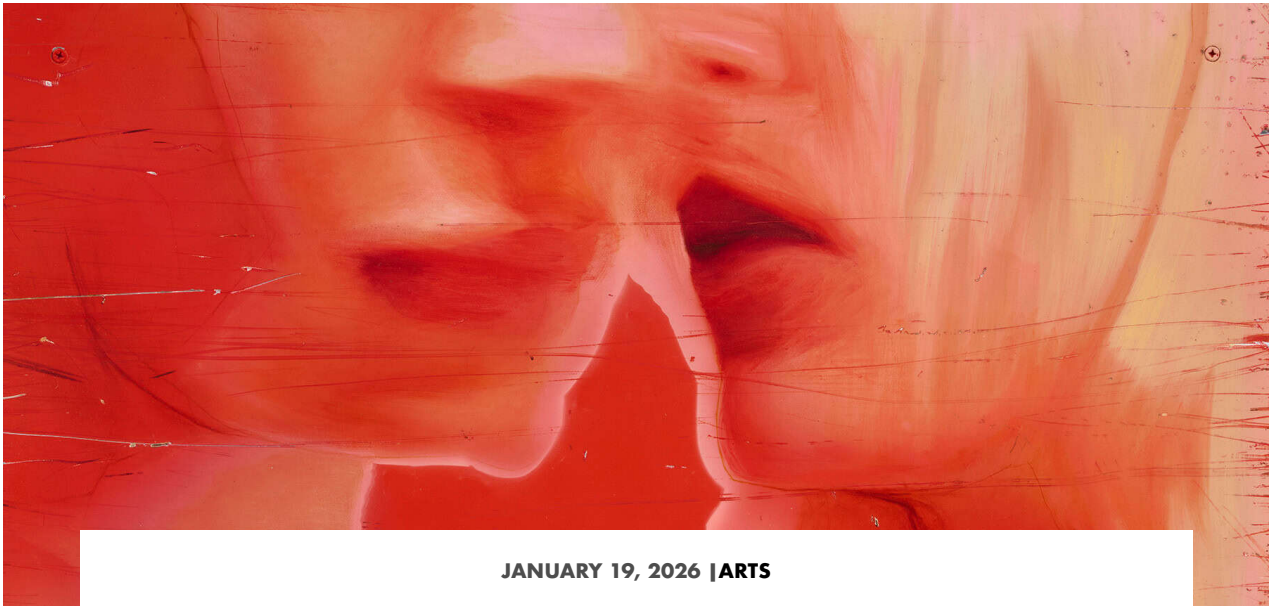


Sam Lipp, Censer, 2025

(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography Eva Herzog)

'I've always hated smooth things,' he tells me. 'The first paintings I made after college were inkjet prints that were painted on top, so they started as a photo. The direction I forged for myself at college was how much aesthetic territory could I explore away from my own hand. I want to explore both the photographic and painterly nature of the image. Where can it break and where can we find ourselves?'

Lipp graduated from Goldsmiths in 2010 and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago the following year. His early work was driven by the digital landscape of its time, drawing upon the user-driven visual material of gay hookup apps and social media. 'It definitely felt more liberatory in 2015 than it does now!' he laughs. 'These technologies have a very direct relationship with our bodies. I'm thinking of this hive mind consciousness that has now evolved into AI.'



JANUARY 19, 2026 | ARTS

TEN'S TO SEE: SAM LIPP'S 'BASE' AT SOFT OPENING

BY BELLA KOOPMAN

New York-based artist [Sam Lipp](#), whose debut London exhibition *Base* opened on Saturday, isn't interested in a pristine canvas. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Using various destructive techniques, such as frottage (a quick Google search told me this is the process of transferring the textures of one surface onto another by rubbing), he uses texturised steel, made via friction with pavement cement, as the canvas for his intimate human portraits. Part of the collaborative, city-wide exhibition known as [Condo](#), wherein 50 galleries across London have opened their doors to international artists who rarely (or have never) exhibited in the UK, Lipp's exhibition is signalling the beacon on talent across the pond.



Ten, 2026

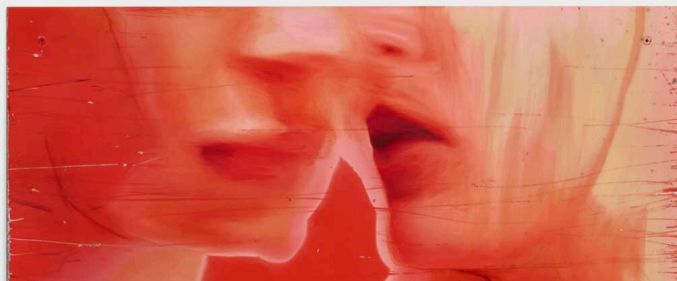
The steel is often rusted by Lipp, a choice which also speaks to his wider artistic practice of not taking things as they are. Using his work to question the capitalist systems of power that sustain Western society and the position of the image within that, Lipp's work has many layers, figuratively and literally. Take frottage itself. Alongside its artsy meaning, frottage also denotes rubbing against someone else, fully clothed and amongst a crowd, as a way of getting sexual gratification. But that's certainly a no go. This double entendre also speaks to another idea Lipp explores in his work – the commodification of the human body, especially within the sphere of sex and relationships. Grindr, for example, is one of the subjects dissected by the artist. It takes a second to wrap your head around, but once Lipp's complex approach has been digested, the strength of his message lands a sucker punch.



Lipp also tends to manipulate the image from its original form before it even goes onto the wrecked canvas. Using overexposure, the images feel fluid in their aesthetic. Striking in their colourways – deep red and metallic yellows form the base for some pieces, silvery grey for others – Lipp's work stops the viewer in their tracks, encouraging them to scratch beneath the surface, in all senses, and face what's underneath.

'Base' is open now at Soft Opening in East London and runs until March 14. Photography courtesy of Soft Opening.

[@shoplifting__](#)



ART

The Contemporary Art Exhibitions Worth Leaving The House For This Winter

BY MAHORO SEWARD

26 January 2026

Stellar winter showings aren't limited to institutions. Back in London, Condo – essentially an annual gallery exchange programme that sees some of the world's most directional galleries set up shop for a month or so – offers a beacon in the gloom. There's too much to list – though you can skim the full programme [here](#) – but a quick edit of highlights include: Company Gallery's presentation of delectably camp, odd figurative sculptures by Downtown New York fashion-as-art provocateurs Women's History Museum (until 14 February), hosted by [Soft Opening](#). While you're there, take the time to pore over a stand-out presentation of post-climax, "frotted" paintings on metal plates by Sam Lipp (until 14 March).



Sam Lipp, Tyrannicides, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

The New York Times

Frieze New York's Intimate Art Fair Pops Up at the Shed

With 68 galleries, the fair allows collectors to “spend quality time,” with works ranging from granite sculptures to contemporary Pointillist paintings.



“Joe (Flesh)” (2023) by the New York painter Sam Lipp. It will be shown at Frieze New York by Derosia of New York.

Temporary “pop-up” editions of retail stores and restaurants have proliferated in the past few years. And what is an art fair if not a specialized, group version of that idea?

The 11th edition of the fair Frieze New York will pop up at the Shed in Hudson Yards this week, from Thursday to Sunday, and will feature 68 galleries.

Derosia is one of 11 galleries in the Focus section, for galleries less than 12 years old. The group includes Whistle of Seoul and Cooper Cole of Toronto.

Derosia is one of 11 galleries in the Focus section, for galleries less than 12 years old. The group includes Whistle of Seoul and Cooper Cole of Toronto.

“I attended Frieze New York last year as a visitor, and I appreciated the high quality of galleries and the manageable size,” Elyse Derosia, the co-owner of Derosia, located in Little Italy. “It allows you to spend quality time.”

“I had great conversations,” she added. “If I were a collector, I would appreciate that intimacy.”

She is presenting a solo booth with the work of the New York painter Sam Lipp, the subject of a show at the gallery last year. Some of his works, like “Joe (Flesh)” (2023), are painted on metal. The artist often uses steel wool as a paintbrush to create tiny dots of paint, in a contemporary spin on Pointillism.

“It’s very beautiful, and also dark and mysterious,” she said of Mr. Lipp’s work. “People responded to it strongly at the solo show we did in the gallery.”

Frieze, 2022

FRIEZE

Sam Lipp's Tasteful Titellations

At Derosia, the artist presents a body of work that stirs both our commercial and corporeal desires.

by John Belknap

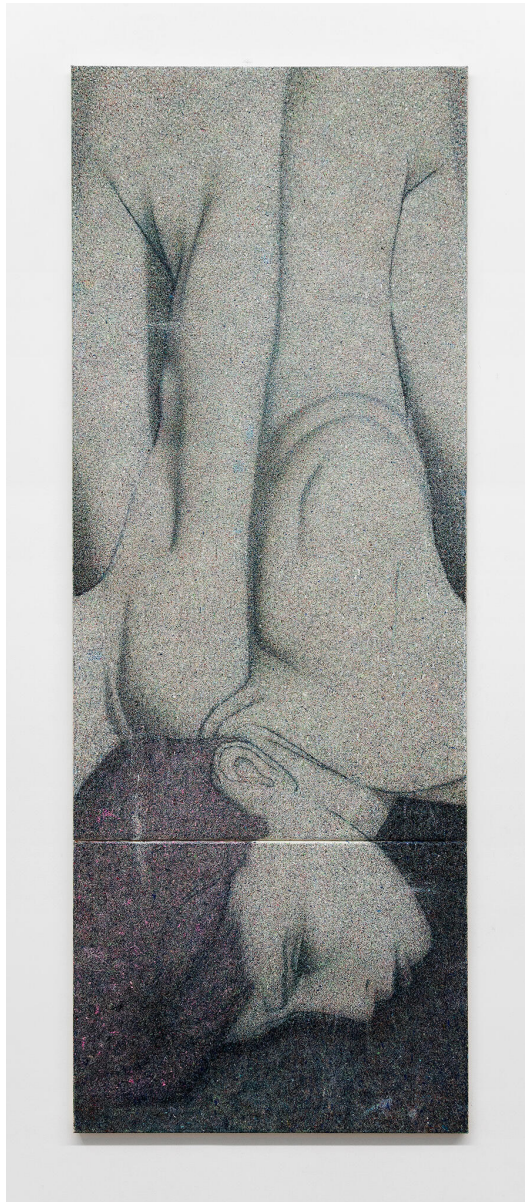


Sam Lipp, *Pollution twink*, 2022, oil on steel and screws, 48 × 58 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Derosia Gallery, New York

The adorable youth in Sam Lipp's self-portrait *Pornocracy* (2021) titillates, tastefully. Better, maybe: he fascinates by plumbing the aesthetics of pornography. Sam's lips spread open. A few teeth peek out from his misty mouth, and to the left glows the underside of his white button nose. Above these, a single shut eye: a lone black crack in the smooth surface of his face, which resembles a ball of brioche dough. It folds limply into his armpit where his left tricep meets his ribcage. Further down, towards his waist, you'll soon discover his awesome arse slope. The fleshy arch appears at the canvas's centre, disappearing again off its right-hand edge.

Lately, Lipp has taken to regularly depicting dough-faced rent boys. For his solo show at Derosia, 'Leaving the Factory', Lipp hunts and gathers images of youthful male hustlers from print magazines and websites. Once niche, the assortment of gay imagery he culls from is now instantly accessible to us, thanks to the way pornography governs our parasocial, post-internet lives. Anyone with a camera can transform into a pornstar. Perhaps this is what is meant by the title of Lipp's two self-portraits, *Pornocracy* and *Pornocracy 2* (2022). Both paintings are characterized by a humourless intent to turn the self into a porn star in order to stimulate something erotic. Both self-portraits capture Lipp arse up, split open off-frame, begging to be (ful)filled.

Frieze, 2022



Sam Lipp, *Pornocracy 2*, 2022, oil on steel 168 × 61 × 2 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Derosia Gallery, New York

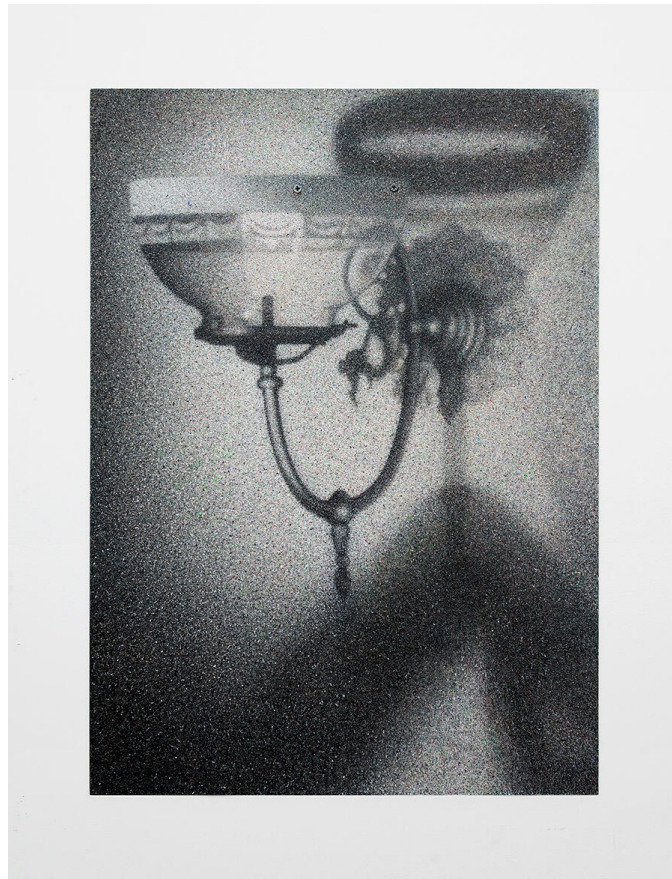
The rent boys Lipp has painted and drawn for works in this exhibition include reproductions from all sorts of archives. The artist's sources range from vintage Eastern European smut (*Pollution twink*, 2022), personal ads from RentMen.com (*Sortie de l'Usine*, 2020), and the artist's own in-person encounters, as evinced by works such as *Patrick's Chest* (2022). The latter is a pencil-on-steel drawing that depicts a twink's towering concave torso. *Patrick's Chest* is sculpted by thousands of shiny crosshatches and shows off Lipp's assiduous eye for detail. On *Patrick's chest* are two misaligned nipples, a belly button and the tip of an elastic waistband. There is no logo on this underwear, so here the man's body becomes the brand – it's not his undergarments but his exposed body that stirs both our commercial and corporeal desires.

Frieze, 2022

Alongside the images of men are paintings of a lamp (*Gaslight*, 2021–22), and a series of works that reference the form of road signs. The signs hang from screws drilled directly into the gallery wall; most come as up-pointing triangles painted in speckled neon pink and silver. While driving, it's common to pull up and slowdown in response to a down-pointing triangular sign that signals 'YIELD'. Conversely, an up-pointing triangle road sign screams '!', meaning a danger point approaches. One can only wonder whether the reverse of a YIELD sign, like Lipp's pink-triangle painting (which shares its title with that of the exhibition), might be one that says 'COME!'

The signs, like several of their counterpart pieces depicting rent boys, are painted in layers on steel sheets. These layers are applied via flicks of a steel-wool paintbrush, giving the images a digital, bitmap/retro pointillist feel. Several of Lipp's blissed-out boys you've probably seen around before. They are the boys who can give you that same old blood rush with just a new kind of touch. As a matter of fact, give a rent boy a few hundred bucks and they'll serve you anything you want, from the most surreal fantasies to the ultimate boyfriend experience. Pornocracy promises so much.

Sam Lipp's 'Leaving the Factory' is on view at Derosia, New York, until 25 June.



Sam Lipp, *Gaslight*, 2021-2022, oil and prismatic film on steel and screws, 74 × 53 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Derosia Gallery, New York

SPIKE

PARIS

**Sam Lipp
"Incest"**

Bonny Poon
28 March–5 April 2019

Bonny Poon gallery is perched on the 26th floor of the Tour Rubis, which is one of the many residential towers in Paris' 13th arrondissement that embody the Manhattanist schizophrenia that the city experienced under the presidency of Georges Pompidou in the early 70s. Elevated superhighways and high-rise condominiums were to reify the economical apex of the Glorious Thirty after World War II, that is, until this pharaonic project, which aimed at transforming Paris into Epcot, was

brutally stopped by Pompidou's successor Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his architectural favorite Ricardo Bofill. The tower is the stillborn child of French modernity whose architectural icons are the monotonous Monoprix, well described by Michel Houellebecq, that hosts Paris's most Kool-Aid artistic program. Founded in 2017, Bonny Poon proposes a unique assemblage of synthetic-pop hermeticism with an anti-radical chic attitude. Sam Lipp's exhibition, "Incest", the last occurring in this location, is a stringent manifestation of the gallery's appetite for *Fantasia* and Greer Lankton-esque figures.

Installed with the straightforwardness of a bullet's path in a dealer's

head, *2746782FH008_jacko_po* (2019) is an oil reproduction of Michael Jackson's mugshot taken on November 20, 2003, after the police arrested the singer on child-molestation charges. It is the only work in the gallery's living room and it challenges the viewer with his gaze, which seems to be loaded with an irreconcilable mixture of innocence, guilt, and vertiginous despair. A recurring motif in Lipp's work, the emaciated traits and the over-dilated pupils of the forever-child of American pop, but this one is owned by Getty Images – or at least, it is what its watermark wants us to believe. The company is known for watermarking and selling pictures belonging to the public domain such as



View of Sam Lipp, "Incest",
Bonny Poone, Paris, 2019
Left: *2746782FH008_jacko_po*, 2019
Oil on steel, 46 x 34 cm

Photos: Romain Darmaud

SPIKE

PARIS

footage from the Holocaust. This image, as well as the other pictures taken from Jackson's judiciary odyssey, are now subjected to an Olympic volatility: one can purchase waterproof stickers, wall art, beach towels, and wallets with Jackson's mugshot. But if Lipp's gesture could be akin to a Warholian pop martyrology, it is in the transformation of Michael Jackson into one of the most powerful modern-day taboos, as the title of the show seems to suggest. Considered as an artwork in itself, the exhibition scrutinises desire and the production of taboos as an ultimate and universal principle of social organisation. Indeed, incest and to a lesser extent, pedophilia are the supreme alterity against which human

organisation structures itself. Biological or social? Epigenetic or moralistic? No one is able to source the mother of all interdictions, a sulfurous luxury that can only be enjoyed at a certain height by the Hellenistic gods. In that regard, *Coffin (After Jade)* (2019) suspends any resolution and lets us muse in front of a bathtub whose water is about to overflow. It is encircled by a bottle of Dr. Hauschka water essence and a fading portrait of Charlize Theron posing in a J'adore Dior perfume ad, which were not originally part of the installation but left intentionally in place. Alluding to the artist Jade Kuriki Olivo's transition from male to female, this work nods at the symbolism of the cleansing process

as an equivocal site of purification that often conceals the social obligation of making oneself legible to the collective gaze. A gaze that can also convert intimacy into a valuable social currency as *IMG_0818 (January 3, 2017)* (2019) suggests. This bottom-view selfie of Lipp was used as the main communication material for the show on social media along with a clip from Taylor Swift's ethereal video *Delicate (Vertical Version)* (2018).

"Ash is our purest form" as the late Lil Peep taught us. "Incest" seems to critically indulge this maxim in linking the idea of immaculate perfection to an eschatological horizon.

Charles Teyssou



Sam Lipp, *Coffin (After Jade)*,
2019
Bathtub, sink, water,
dimensions variable

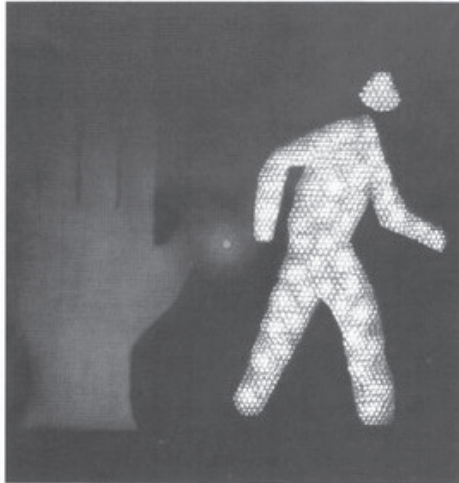


Civic Duty

Cell Project Space London 6 June to 21 July

'Civic Duty' brings together the work of four excellent artists from different generations: Adrian Piper (b1948), Donald Rodney (1961-1998), Carolyn Lazard (b1987) and Sam Lipp (b1989). In and of itself, the selection is worth making the trip to Cell Project Space. Although this is not foregrounded in the display, these artists all experienced some form of marginalisation in their lives, because of their sexuality, skin colour or health status (or all three combined). Much of their output can be placed at that delicate juncture where the individual collides with the institution and opts to push back with a mixture of wit and carefully controlled rage. In fact, if the exhibition had to be summed up in a word, 'control' would be it.

The first thing one sees on entering the gallery is an old motorised chair circling around the room as if it was being piloted remotely. There is something comical about its motions, even though its empty seat and yellowed cushion conjure associations with death and decay. The chair used to belong to Rodney, the highly politicised artist who in 1982 started the BLK Art Group with Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper and Marlene Smith. Rodney lived with sickle-



Sam Lipp
Walk 2019

cell anaemia (a condition that he often referred to as BLK BLOOD DISEASE) until his death in 1998, at the age of 36.

Rodney's illness meant that in 1997 he was unable to attend the private view of his own solo show at the South London Gallery (Obituary *AM215*). As a replacement and a marker of his absence, the artist submitted his motorised chair, now envisaged as a cybernetic sculpture titled *Psalms*. The piece is equipped with a computer program designed to map the room and self-pilot around any obstacles. It makes for a stark commentary on Rodney's struggle to retain a level of control in the face of debilitating illness and pervasive ableism in the art world.

A different form of control plays out in Lipp's paintings. Lipp is based in New York, where he runs a gallery called 'Queer Thoughts'. In the past, he has made photorealist paintings that comment on how civic spaces (including

hospitals) function as disciplinary environments. For this commission, Lipp produced three exquisite oils based on digital close-ups of US pedestrian crossing signs. The series is titled 'Walk' because each painting juxtaposes the unlit sign of the stop hand with a glowing silhouette prompting us to 'walk' across the room. So often welcomed in our daily lives, this invitation takes on a singularly coercive meaning next to Rodney's mobility chair.

In the adjacent room Adrian Piper is paired with Lazard to create an environment that feels in equal measure sterile and oppressive. Piper is best known for her performative interventions, particularly the series 'Mythic Being', 1972-75, for which she disguised herself as an androgynous and racially indeterminate New Yorker. Photographic documentation of the performance fed into several works on paper, initiating her lifelong love affair with Conceptual Art. The works shown here are recent examples in this vein.

Vanishing Point #4 and #5, 2009, were made using official Application for Employment forms (federal documents designed to enforce fair recruitment practice across the US). Piper sabotaged the ostensibly inclusive language of these questionnaires by writing down the wrong answers (to the question 'what kind of work are you applying for?' she replied, elusively, 'vanishing point'). She also erased the original script using graphite and sandpaper.

In keeping with the rest of Piper's oeuvre, the works in the 'Vanishing Point' series convey a desire to transcend a reality that is fundamentally structured around the principle of surveillance. This idea resonates with Lazard's adjacent piece, *A Conspiracy*. Originally created in 2017 for Essex Street Gallery in New York, the installation is designed to cover the entire ceiling with evenly spaced white-noise machines. Although the muffled vibration they emit is supposed to be soothing, they acquire an ominous quality through sheer repetition. I have always hated the sound, so it doesn't take me long to decide I feel claustrophobic, yet these machines are regularly used in hospitals to control all manner of physical and psychological ailments.

Lazard lives with Crohn's disease and is painfully familiar with the clinical world. Their writings on chronic illness and the limitations of western biomedicine are the most engaging texts I have recently come across on the topic. Their visual works are no less compelling (one of my personal favourites is *Get Well Soon*, a short film from 2015, available on the artist's website), yet this is only the second time that Lazard has shown in the UK, following a screening at LUX in 2018. I would love to see more of their work in this country. As a matter of fact, I left Cell feeling that the display as a whole had the potential to grow into a much larger exhibition. Who will rise to the challenge? ■

Giulia Smith is an art historian based in London.

ARTFORUM

Sam Lipp

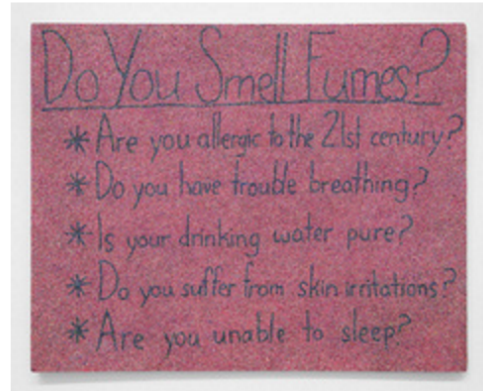
BODEGA

167 Rivington Street, Lower Level East
September 10–October 16

At Yany's Beauty Salon on Rivington Street, a handful of mostly Hispanic workers can be seen spraying hair products and administering heating regimens over casual chatter, while a distinct trace of aerosol and burnt keratin wafts outside. Next door, beside Yany's magenta street signage, a work by Sam Lipp, *Do You Smell Fumes?* (all works 2016), displays its inquisitive title in electric green neon. Inside the gallery, the same thought becomes an aesthetic motif, interrogating notions of purity as they extend to common understandings of wellness, security, and normalized social relations. But, in doing so, the project seems to gloss over another important consideration: How are these ideas socially positioned?

Most of the other works on view, foamcore surfaces painted many times over in acrylic with brushes and steel wool, resemble, in equal parts, bokeh and pixelated grain. One composition echoes its probing question along with some scrawled text reading, "Are you allergic to the 21st century? Do you have trouble breathing?" These lines nod to Todd Haynes's 1995 drama *Safe*, in which the life of an affluent San Fernando Valley housewife, played by Julianne Moore, unravels as she develops MCS—multiple chemical sensitivity—a debilitating psychosomatic aversion to many everyday chemicals distributed through global capitalism.

In another acrylic work, *Paris Is Paris*, a male with his torso, cock, and balls exposed rests in bed next to another body—a moment of serene, banal affection. While Lipp importantly investigates the tenuousness of social binaries and their regulatory functions, the project would benefit from acknowledging how these forces serve class relations. An external menace, the cry of fumes, and the formation of conventional partnerships all conjure up ruling-class attitudes toward the working class—after all, doesn't hegemony's very conception suggest power is always under threat?



Sam Lipp, *Do You Smell Fumes?*, 2016,
acrylic on foamcore, 20 x 16".

— Nicolas Linnert

Soft Opening,

*6 Minerva Street,
London E2 9EH*

+44 20 3876 0270

*info@
softopening.london*