

KANSAS SMEATON

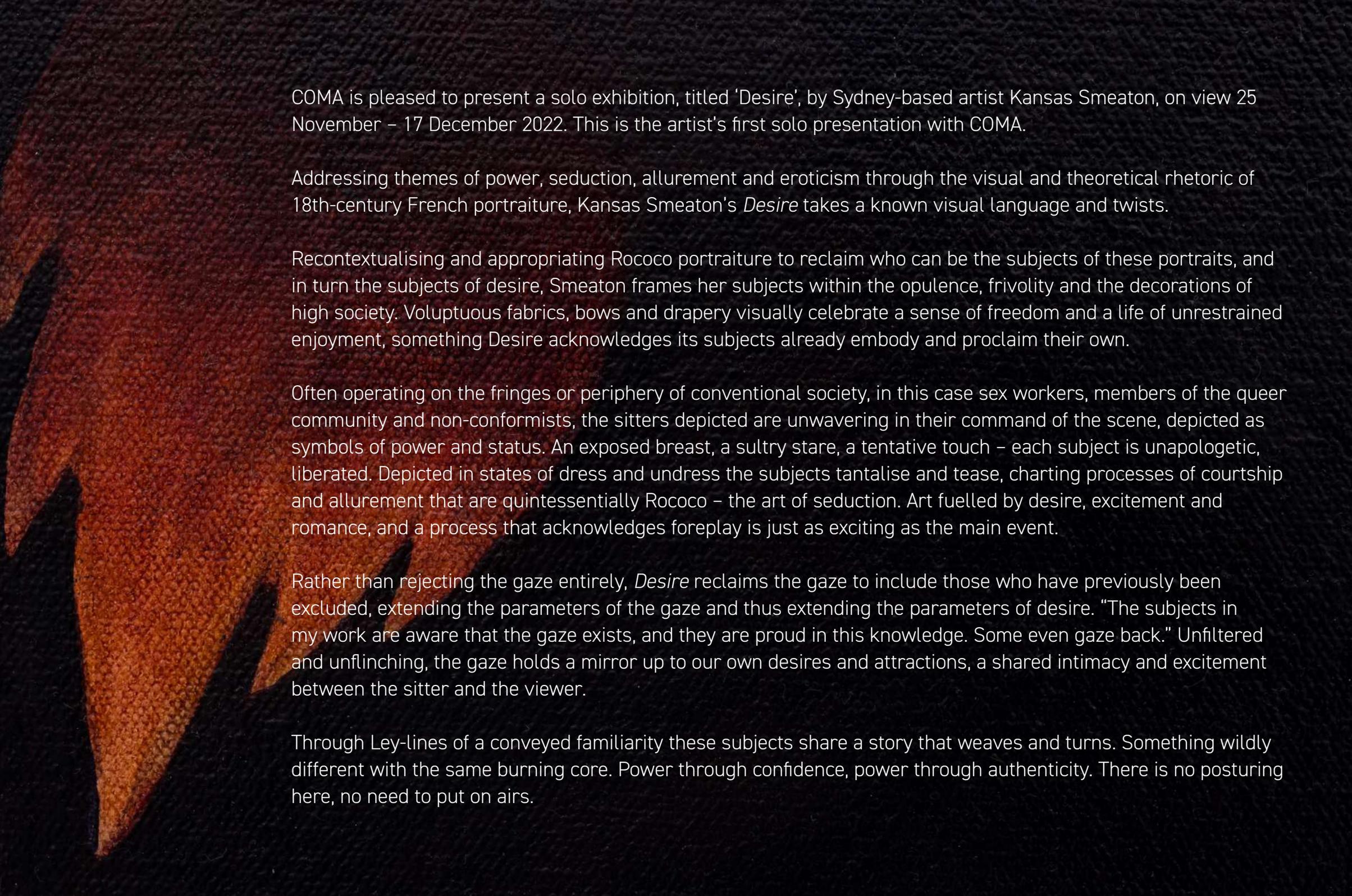
Desire

COMA - Chippendale

25 November - 17 December, 2022

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COMA is pleased to present a solo exhibition, titled 'Desire', by Sydney-based artist Kansas Smeaton, on view 25 November – 17 December 2022. This is the artist's first solo presentation with COMA.

Addressing themes of power, seduction, allurements and eroticism through the visual and theoretical rhetoric of 18th-century French portraiture, Kansas Smeaton's *Desire* takes a known visual language and twists.

Recontextualising and appropriating Rococo portraiture to reclaim who can be the subjects of these portraits, and in turn the subjects of desire, Smeaton frames her subjects within the opulence, frivolity and the decorations of high society. Voluptuous fabrics, bows and drapery visually celebrate a sense of freedom and a life of unrestrained enjoyment, something *Desire* acknowledges its subjects already embody and proclaim their own.

Often operating on the fringes or periphery of conventional society, in this case sex workers, members of the queer community and non-conformists, the sitters depicted are unwavering in their command of the scene, depicted as symbols of power and status. An exposed breast, a sultry stare, a tentative touch – each subject is unapologetic, liberated. Depicted in states of dress and undress the subjects tantalise and tease, charting processes of courtship and allurements that are quintessentially Rococo – the art of seduction. Art fuelled by desire, excitement and romance, and a process that acknowledges foreplay is just as exciting as the main event.

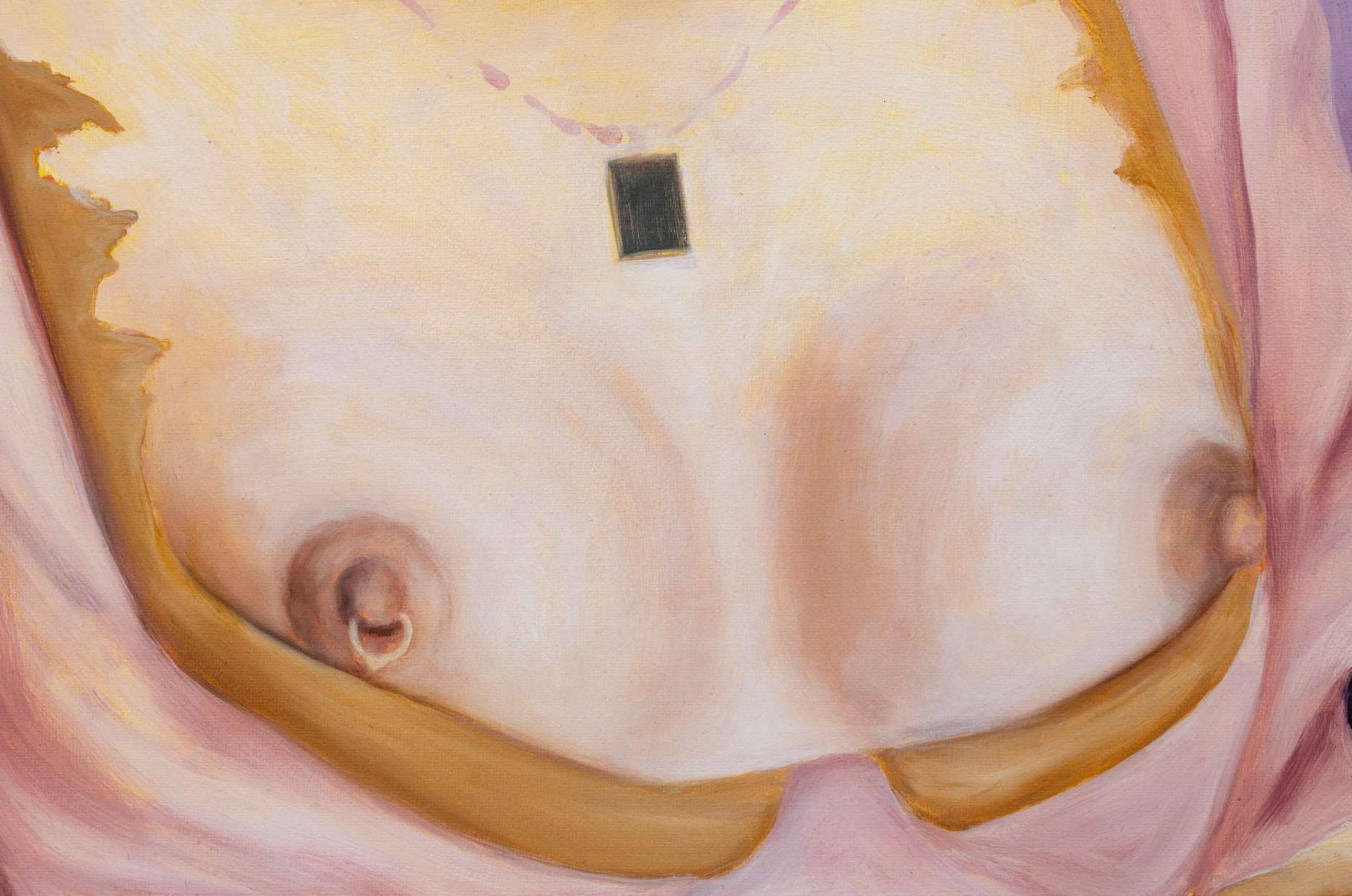
Rather than rejecting the gaze entirely, *Desire* reclaims the gaze to include those who have previously been excluded, extending the parameters of the gaze and thus extending the parameters of desire. "The subjects in my work are aware that the gaze exists, and they are proud in this knowledge. Some even gaze back." Unfiltered and unflinching, the gaze holds a mirror up to our own desires and attractions, a shared intimacy and excitement between the sitter and the viewer.

Through Ley-lines of a conveyed familiarity these subjects share a story that weaves and turns. Something wildly different with the same burning core. Power through confidence, power through authenticity. There is no posturing here, no need to put on airs.





Kansas Smeaton (b. 1992) is a New Zealand born artist who lives and practices in Sydney, NSW. Spending her childhood in a liberal minded community environment in New Zealand has greatly shaped her attitude towards autonomy, freedom and self expression. Smeaton's work draws on the artist's fascination with the complicated relationship between power, gender and sexuality. Engaging with the traditional art historical strategies of symbolism and portraiture, Smeaton's paintings not only comment on the fraught and outmoded nature of the gender binary but critique christocentric ideas around sexuality. They also present an interrogation to these dated ideologies through the portrayal of strong subjects who push the boundaries of societal expectations. Still life, memento mori and religion are referenced along with portraits of subjects who exude confidence within themselves. The focus of these portraits are members of the artists community who live their life in an authentic and unconventional way. Whether women who practice liberation, members of the LGBTI community, sex workers or those who are simply undefinable, these subjects are not repressed victims of their gender or sexuality, instead they rise above it in power to claim their bodily autonomy, sexuality and even eroticism.





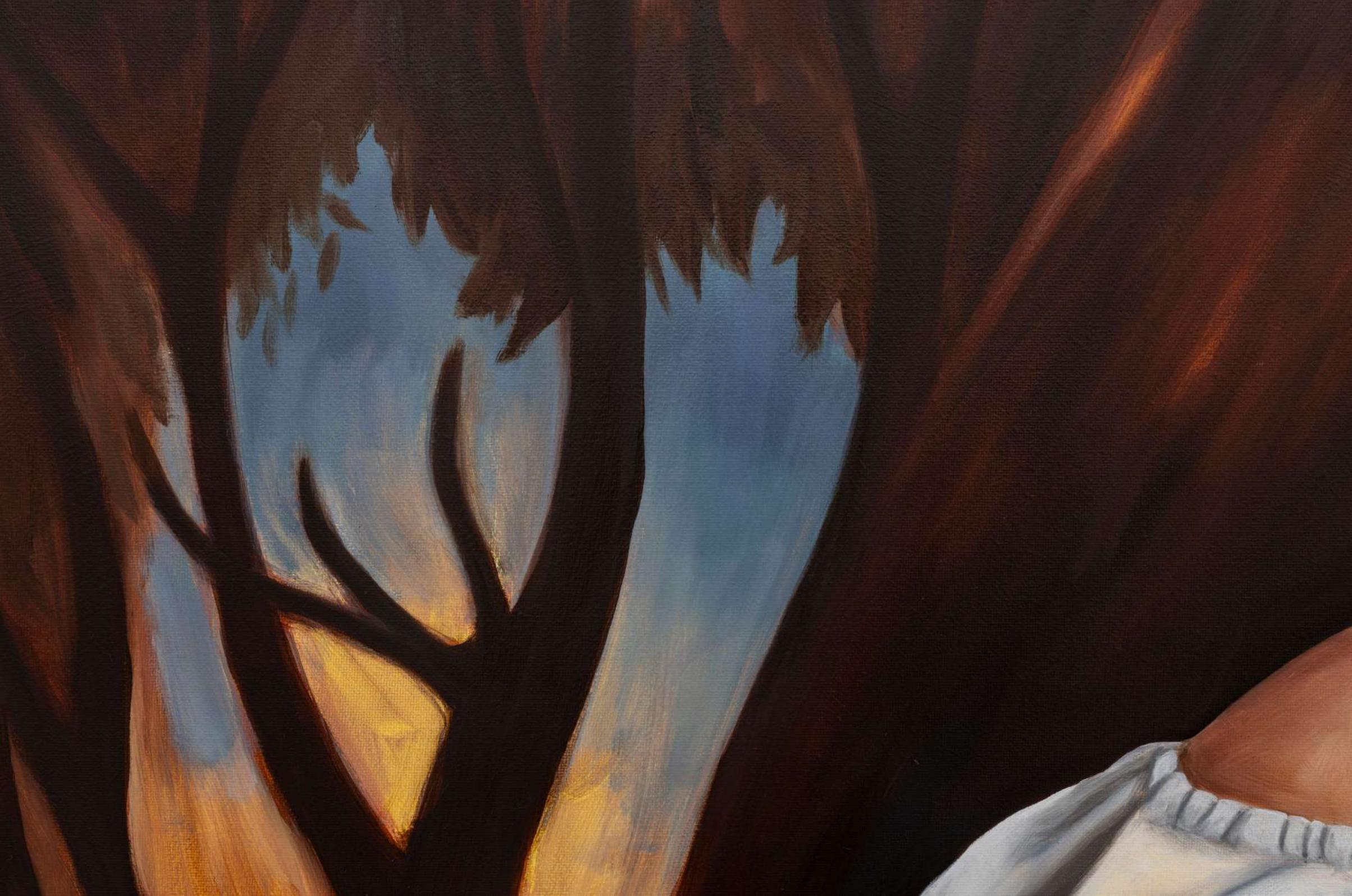
Kansas Smeaton
Harry, 2022
oil on canvas
122 x 102 cm
48 x 40 inches

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This portrait of Harry balances density and lightness through an intersection of frivolity and sincerity. The purple and pink hues that fill the canvas contain a playfulness and flirtatiousness, hinting at the campness of the Rococo. Harry's hands delicately pulling at the ribbon on her thigh lead the viewer to the precipice of desire, insinuating and sensual.







Kansas Smeaton
Liam and Psalm, 2022
oil on canvas
137 x 112 cm
54 x 44 inches

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This scene directly references Rococo pastoral scenes, with dark hues of dusk and the impending evening offsetting pale pastels the figures are wearing. A tangle of limbs in a tentative embrace. Are they lovers, friends, relatives? Acquaintances old or new? Implied but never completely disclosed, these subtleties are suggestive of the erotic undertones prominent in Rococo love scenes.







Kansas Smeaton
Madonna and Chico, 2022
oil on canvas
102 x 91.5 cm
40 x 36 inches

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Her working name, Madonna, is an ode to the dichotomous perceptions of women, as either, good or bad, chaste or impure. Defined by neither of those sentiments, Madonna is unapologetic and assured in her sexuality and seduction, she is liberated by her authenticity. Clutching her small white lap dog, Chico, a symbol of female power and status in the Rococo period, Madonna is regal and reassured. Set against a royal blue backdrop, referential to darker tones more often seen at the beginning of the Rococo period, Smeaton positions Madonna as a subject of royal portraiture.







Kansas Smeaton
Grapes, 2022
oil on canvas
40.5 x 35.5 cm
16 x 14 inches

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Kansas Smeaton
Julia with pearls, 2022
oil on canvas
122 x 102 cm
48 x 40 inches

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Kansas Smeaton's work is inspired by the attitudes and traits of the people she paints – using her portraits of others as a mirror she holds up to herself. Strong and unapologetic in her femininity, 'Julia's' confident and alluring gaze creates an intensity of intimacy. Julia, a designer shoemaker, sensually clutches a string of pearls between the tips of her fingers, presenting them as objects of desire. This eroticisation of inanimate objects was abundant in Rococo paintings and used to convey the innate and unavoidable sexual fantasy within all of us.







Kansas Smeaton
Madonna and Lilith, 2022
oil on canvas
122 x 102 cm
48 x 40 inches



Dressed in the decorations of high society, with satin bows, tight corsets, and voluminous fabrics, Madonna and Lilith relish in a life of unfiltered enjoyment and pleasure. Madonna gently pulls on the lace from Lilith's corset, a subtly sensual and erotic act. There is an intimacy in the embrace shared between them, the nature of their relationship remaining unclear.







Kansas Smeaton
Apple, 2022
oil on canvas
40.5 x 35.5 cm
16 x 14 inches





Kansas Smeaton
Spike with grapes, 2022
oil on canvas
122 x 102 cm
48 x 40 inches

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This portrait of Spike was made when Smeaton spent time investigating the Baroque period. Deep red drapery in the background directly references the red that became synonymous with Caravaggio and his paintings and acts as a nod to both gore and sensuality. With a handful of grapes resting gently in his palm and his shirt unbuttoned, Spike is irresistible in his aesthetic appeal, subverting the notion that men cannot be expressive in their sexuality.





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