

Laurie Smith

Sinthome

The exhibition *Sinthome* by Laurie Smith at Galeria Wschód presents artist's latest paintings, which delve into the complexities of queer presence and subjectivity in the contemporary metropolis. The project takes the form of a site-specific painting installation, where individual works function as fragments of a single nocturnal narrative, constructing a layered intimacy of fleeting encounters. Smith continues his research into the visual and social strategies of constructing queer life within the social imagination. The works engage with the psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance* – a state of intensity in which pleasure and pain are inseparable, and the categories of trauma and celebration converge. This condition forms the exhibition's point of departure, where painting becomes a tool for exploring unstable identities and porous social roles.

The exhibition's title references a term in Jacques Lacan's thought that denotes an individual's way of sustaining a relationship with their own experience. In this context, the *sinthome* is what enables one to persist despite internal tensions, contradictions, and the elusive intensity of lived experience.

Smith draws from art history exploring a vast compositional strategies to construct scenes of cruising, performance, and nocturnal gatherings. On one hand, the paintings reference the history of twentieth-century painting – particularly the tensions present in Balthus's work or the spatial distortions and decorative flatness associated with

Henri Matisse – while on the other hand, they are firmly rooted in the queer everyday of nighttime London.

The figures inhabiting the canvases operate at the intersection of the private and the public, suspended mid-gesture in moments whose significance remains unresolved. Their presence unfolds within spaces marked both by the possibility of an encounter and the risk of an exposure. The compositions draw on histories of the regulation of queer life in public spaces, where laws governing the assembly of same-sex individuals shaped their visibility, comfort and basic freedom. The relationships between the figures remain ambiguous and performative. Recurring motifs of a nightlife operate as cultural codes related to identity and desire, creating a space that offers a refuge.

Smith is interested in the everyday life and emotional atmosphere of queer spaces that are disappearing under the pressures of gentrification, surveillance, and social change. He treats them as social codes through which marginalized communities recognize one another. The exhibition repeatedly returns to the feeling of being suspended between safe environment and control. Interiors reminiscent of basement bars with sticky floors and clandestine members' clubs become sanctuaries shaped by desire, vulnerability, and coded forms of recognition.

At the beginning Warsaw was our centre, but gradually we learnt there isn't one exact, particular centre. We can have a lot of different ones, and that was the foundation of thinking beyond Warsaw.

If everything is continuously evolving and changing, we need to somehow do it as well.

Wschód is a contemporary art gallery operating in Warsaw. It runs experimental pop up spaces, residencies, and curatorial projects globally.

The name translates to *sunrise* and *geographical east*. It refers to *new beginning*.

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Wschód

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Jouissance emerges in the fissures of language, in experiences that transcend the boundaries of what can be articulated. It is a sensation born from excess, intensity, and at times, suffering – an inseparable aspect of human desire.

– Inspired by Jacques Lacan’s theory of *jouissance*

Laurie Smith (b. 1994, Huddersfield, UK) lives and works in London, UK. He received a BA (Hons) in Fine Art from Goldsmiths, University of London. Recent solo exhibitions include Brick Boys (2025) with Gathering; Private Lives (2025) with Brunette Coleman; A Flower for a Heart (2024) with Painters Painting Paintings; and Lauri Smith (2024) with diez gallery. Selected group exhibitions include Parloir (2024), Tournai; Day by Day, Good Day (2023) with Union Pacific; Stranger Than Paradise (2022) with V.O Curations; and Sky-blue and green (2020), also with V.O Curations.

