

TOM POLO

soft secrets

soft secrets

an arm arrives, divides
another easy ride
double doubt
secret shield
dress rehearsal
I can no longer absorb you
listen for love
see something say something
sink or swim
ready to return
too close to call
dream sequence
remember the end
dissolve and disappear
wallow swallow

Lured in chorus

Gina Mobayed on Tom Polo

In this new body of work, *soft secrets*, Tom Polo works exclusively on paper and continues his investigations into figurative abstraction. Every panel has been treated with the hallmarks of his practice; broad, vibrant washes of colour and confident line work gently merge into suggestive figurations. Each work in *soft secrets* is a unique character, their role authored by Polo through the gesture and directional gaze he creates especially for them. These characters are informed by the artist's ongoing and consuming observations of the people and interactions happening around him. Polo is interested in acts of looking and how this can inform our very being within lived experience. He distills this broad, conceptual realm into nuanced mannerisms responding to stimuli — the way a hand might curl its fingers, how expression can settle in the lips or the flash of darting eyes.

Over time Polo has built a significant swathe of memories and documented gestures that he recalls and reinvents as he forms each figure, or character. This series presents a deepening intensity between the artist and his reference material, exemplified in the variation of marks present from panel to panel. Polo currently works with acrylic, Flashe and wax pastel. This trio of materials lends itself to many dilutions and intensities which he embraces in process, deciding when to build or layer upon his workings of the paper, or to erase them. There are moments where Polo has diluted the paint to just an inkling of its original hue, in dissolve and disappear yellow settles as an aura over the figure. In contrast, it is over the intensity of the blue coloured paint in wallow, swallow and its response to the paper that Polo sketches a more defined figure in wax pastel. Polo brings definition in and out of *soft secrets* with deftness but maintains a hovering sense of desire within each character, to be both the stimuli and the stimulated.

an arm arrives,
divides



another
easy ride



double doubt



secret shield



dress rehearsal



I can no longer
absorb you



listen for love



see something
say something



sink or swim



ready to return



too close to call



dream sequence



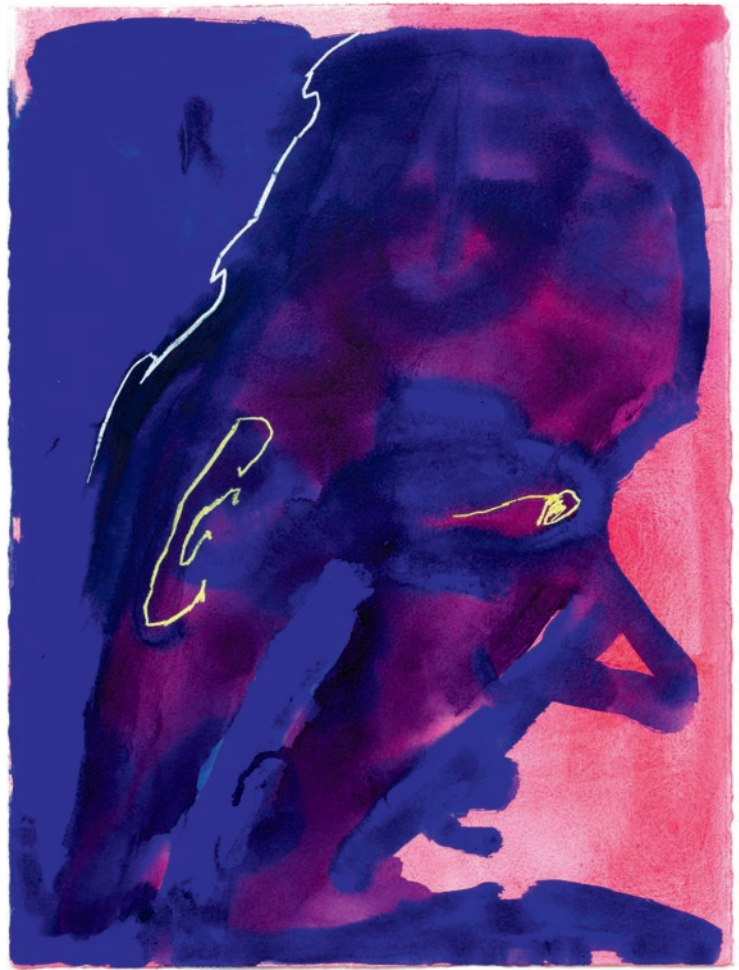
remember
the end



dissolve and
disappear



wallow, swallow



Tom Polo (° 1985, Sydney Australia) works across painting and installation to explore how conversation, gesture and emotional exchange can be transformed into recordings of social interaction and the self. Polo's practice is characterised by his distinctive style of abstracted figuration, rendered in bold, expansive fields of colour. His paintings depict partially obscured and fragmented figures – a painted index of limbs, eyes and hands – through a conceptual and physical merging of observation and imagination, to encourage sustained moments of looking and being.

Polo was a recent finalist in the Geelong Contemporary Art Prize and the National Works on Paper Prize in 2022. He was a finalist in the Ramsay Art Prize, Australia's premier prize for emerging artists (2021), and has been a finalist several times in the Sir John Sulman Art Prize (2021, 2020, 2017). Polo was the winner of the Brett Whiteley Travelling Scholarship, presented by the Art Gallery of New South Wales (2015); The Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize (2014), and the Art & Australia/ Credit Suisse Private Banking Contemporary Art Award (2011).

Significant exhibitions include the 2022 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Free State, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2022); The National: New Australian Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2019); Primavera 2017: Young Australian Artists, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2017); and Painting, More Painting, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2016). He has undertaken residencies at Palazzo Monti, Brescia; Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris; and ACME Studios, London

all drawings:
2022, acrylic, Flashe and wax pastel on
paper,
76,5 x 56,5 cm,
frame with museum glass: 81,5 x 61,5 cm

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