

The Contemporary Painting Magazine

# émergent magazine

Issue Six



Cover Artwork by George Rouy

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Interview by Josep Barnadas

# George Rouy

Born

*1994*





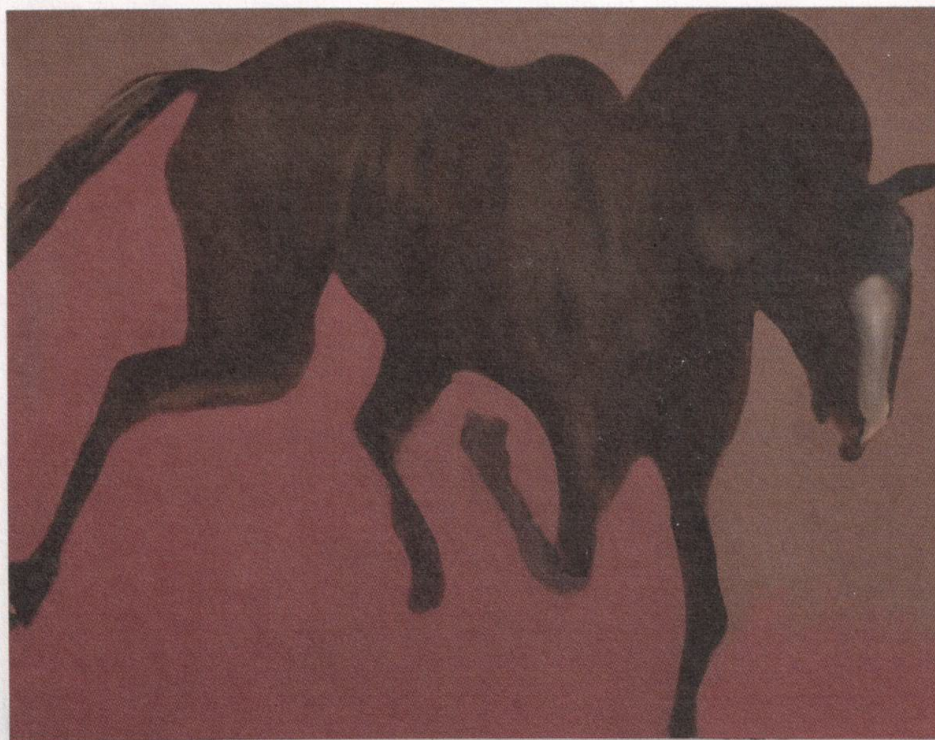
Distance, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 76h x 61w cm



What are you currently working on?

Just before the lockdown started I was doing a show at Mine Projects, for which I couldn't have a proper conclusion that a normal show has. During the confinement I have been able to finish the next series of works that will not only be for exhibitions. In the studio I work in batches of works so that it is coherent, which helps me keep working. I have also been planning a solo show at Hannah Barry Gallery in Peckham which will open in mid-September. I haven't done a show there for a few years

When Harley and I started working on the series of photograms, we did it for fun and throughout the process it ended up becoming a cross-over between our practices, stretching out our dialogue to areas that we were not really used to. From the beginning we wanted to involve the human form, which is very present in both of our practices. The negative space around the figures became very important within the photograms which I relate to my paintings since there is also that area around the figure that exists within the ab-



Dance, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 210h x 270w cm

and it will be a nice introduction to life after lockdown. I will also be included in a group show in London and hopefully by mid-September things will start getting back to normal.

You recently had a group show at Hannah Barry Gallery 'Crowd' which opened in February this year and where you had a painting titled 'Masked' as well as two photograms in collaboration with Harley Weir. Could you describe the elements you see in common between your painting and the photograms in the show?

abstract; bodies suspended in a non-space. Also, the use of the colors red and pink, which I would say are very present in my work however, we used them in a much more dramatic way. Although it was never intentional to create paintings that don't have a lot of narrative in terms of location, over a lot of work I navigated my way through them. Somehow for me a figure in a surrounding doesn't feel like having the same problems and impact as it does when a figure is isolated. However, I think that's down to thinking about every part of the painting as a relevance and not just



decoration; for me, everything has to have a symbolism and I'm worried that when I ground the figures into this world, they might become too sidetracked from what I am trying to achieve. This was a massive part with mine and Harley's work that really worked and continued in that body.

What is it that is on your mind when you are making and how does this influence your process?

When you are talking about the abstract and trying to remove narrative to a certain extent it's always down to a sense of feeling. I always worry when I say it in that way but it's true that when I am thinking about the figure I am thinking about the emotional response for the audience. I trust in an intuitive response from the viewer and I think it really does come down to those simple things. When you look at a painting there will be certain questions asked to the viewer as well as certain questions I ask within my work. I hope the mysteries that come very clear and obvious are all linked-up. When I am in the studio and a piece I am painting becomes too one way I have to bring it back. For example, if it becomes too realistic I have to make it feel more abstract. Or when it becomes too narrative in a way that is too pictorial I have to reduce that feeling. And also the other way round with abstraction in order to balance the elements that stimulate that vision of the work. I feel these ideas are completely solidified in many few of my paintings, but I would say these are elements I am still trying to achieve. They are all sidetracked a little bit but that's just how I am.

What excites you about the act of painting?

I think it's the rush. When you are in the studio making there's always that impulsiveness. In every painting I want to get that hip from what the next work can do. I think I do get this moment of excitement, adrenaline and freshness of starting a painting and I am always trying to chase that next rush all the time. There's that

nice moment of making a painting where it feels alive and energetic because it is coming out of you. After that it comes the refinement and the layers of paint. So the drawing aspect of the painting is a really nice moment for which, of course, makes me want to make more and start the next one. I do a lot of paintings at the same time in order to make them feel energized from the beginning onwards. I like to keep my head in a place all the time by making more works and it is almost as if I was trying to get one up and start again every time.

I'm very interested in the way you compress the figures on the canvas, using the entire surface for their bodies. They look as if they were somehow oppressed and trying to break free from the parameters of the canvas and at the same time they seem to be melting or fading away. How do you think color can affect these ideas of uninhibited freedom and fluidity?

Colour is something I am always exploring and is very subjective. When I start combining colours together is when it gets interesting in the way of working. I am Colour Blind and I find it hard to see red and green. Therefore, it is difficult for me to process colours specially when mixing paints and when trying to arrange them. Although I am trying to expand on my palette, it has always stayed quite limited to a set of six colours but when it comes down to an emotional response, there is something moving that happens when I start to paint. I don't have in mind what colours the paints are going to be before they are made and I mix up a lot of colors. Then I start to arrange and track them in order to understand what other colours could be complementary to the ones I have used. This happens specially with the backgrounds where I question myself how to contrast the colour of the skin of the figures with the colour of the background in order to have this feeling of fading away. It takes a long time mixing those different shades to get them right.





Calm after the Storm, 2020, Acrylic on canvas 270h x 200w cm



When you see the work in real life specially with the larger or darker works you realize there are lots of layers and tones of colours, which might have a feeling as if you were looking at night and colour is completely moving with your eye and nothing feels quite static. I think I have always been interested in the experience of describing something bright but also dark in its nature. What I mean by that is although my paintings are very bright they are still hard to read; almost as if you were looking through fog. These might be the elements I find more interesting than what the colours represent. I am really interested in red, which is a very strong colour that I associate with blood. When I place a red next to a yellow-creamy color there is something that becomes fleshy which I link to a calm-violence visual experience.

Most of the backgrounds of your paintings are flat by the use of one single colour which emphasizes the presence of the bodies in a non-space. You often choose the colours red, violet or blue. What influences this decision?

I would say this happens intuitively when I am making. I start painting the figures and the final stage is always the negative spaces around them. This is how it goes at the moment but it can shift in other ways. Once I have got the skin colour I then think about the highlights and shadows. Some backgrounds can really flatten an image if their colour is not right. It can completely take away the shadows and make it loose something. It takes a long time to just place those. For example, with a reddy or blue tone you want to encounter that and make it cooler or warmer. Mainly I try to make them feel very warm and recently I have been using black a lot and mixing it with the colours to make them feel more earthy. I am really trying to think my colours in other ways and something that has always bothered me are artificial colours. It seems crazy because I use a lot of pinks but there is something beautiful

about those earthy pinks or grey pinks and terracotas. That is something I am exploring at the moment and I am using a lot of pigments.

You have recently made a series of paintings of horses, for which you have used these colors that you are talking about

Yes, they are inspired by the earthy colours that I am talking about. Although the backgrounds in some of them have a pinky colour, they have a more natural and earthy feeling. This is because I applied black, which is such a nice non-colour that really can make another colour sink. The whole series of paintings of horses that I have had in mind for a while, came from the idea of these falling horses that although they seem majestic, they are pictured in a very vulnerable state. I try to make the viewer feel like there is a strange shift in the way you are looking at the horses. That's what where it is right now and since I started the series have evolved in many different ways.

Could you talk a little bit about your process, the softness blurriness in a lot of your works seems technically demanding. How do you make these paintings because they are not made using airbrush...

Everyone thinks it is airbrush, but the blurriness was never something I was trying to form and it naturally became that. The way I paint is through lots of thin layers of fine colour with not too much application. Also, I use unprimed canvas which I think it helps to have a powdery and softy feeling. My process is quite labour intensive and as I was saying before, it is about keeping that energy and excitement. The first few layers are really exciting because I am almost painting the painting and that's where all comes down. The next part is slower, almost like laying and adding it out. Therefore, I take or add more paint to certain areas in order to smoothen it out. Although is more time consuming, it gives that charm and a lot of



people respond to those areas. I paint using up a selection of brushes at the same time; I use an application brush which will have the pigment on. Then I would have a damp large brush to use it as a secondary brush to take paint away and finally I use a dry brush in order to do the last brush over. These are the roots of how I started but it has moved a lot recently by trying to push the mark making. My favorite paintings that exist contain that human element of the mark. It has become very important how I engage with the human figure within painting because there is this physical act of my body that is creating a mark. It is a subconscious connection that is made between both the representation of the figure and the mark making. This happening of creating physical and energized movements are the elements I really want to draw on more.

In your paintings there is a repetition of figurative elements such as horses and swans. How important is symbolism in your work?

The choice of the horse and the swans started through art history. There is a reference to history because they are symbols that have been depicted in so many cultures. Where I am from in Kent the *Invicta* is a white horse. There is a link there and I don't want to be true direct to that but it has always intrigued me. Also, George Stubbs horses in the National Gallery have always drawn to me since they are horses suspended in a non-space and I love them so much. At the moment, I am trying to use the theme of the horses or swans, as a way in which to twist the pre-conceived ideas we have of them. The swans that have a broken neck and the horses I have recently made, always have some type of unease and violence although there is a beauty to them. So, they are all tied to each other in one way and I think the figures should do the same as well.

The figures in your paintings feel almost grotesque, with disproportioned bodies seeming holding a physical and emotional vulnerability as well as a layer of sexual narrative. What are the key influences in creating these?

I have recently been reading Francis Bacon's interviews and I think the way he talks about the form has been a re-confirmation of my own thoughts on how I believe the human form should be represented. I was really intrigued in certain things he said in terms of the mark making and in terms of the psyche and those elements really hit home to me and re-confirmed my own judgement. However, I consciously try not to look too deep with artists. I try to keep clear heads so I can think on my own way. It is a strange thing because I love art so much, but I believe things enter when there is ease in a very subconsciously way. I prefer to look at art a lot but try not to read too much since I believe there is something nice about being on your own well with your own judgement without being contaminated by others.

If I had to mention a heavily influence on my ideas would be the dance company of Sharon Eyal. When I first saw one of her performances at Sadler's Wells I really took to it. It got me in an exceptional way. In her performances, there is not really a set and they are reduced to music and bodies making movements. They are very powerful and it really changed and inspired my approach to figure a lot more through understanding that human movements within the abstract can create such emotional responses. These two things link up so well that made me want to cut all the decoration you get within paintings in order to focus on the figure and make it purely about that experience.

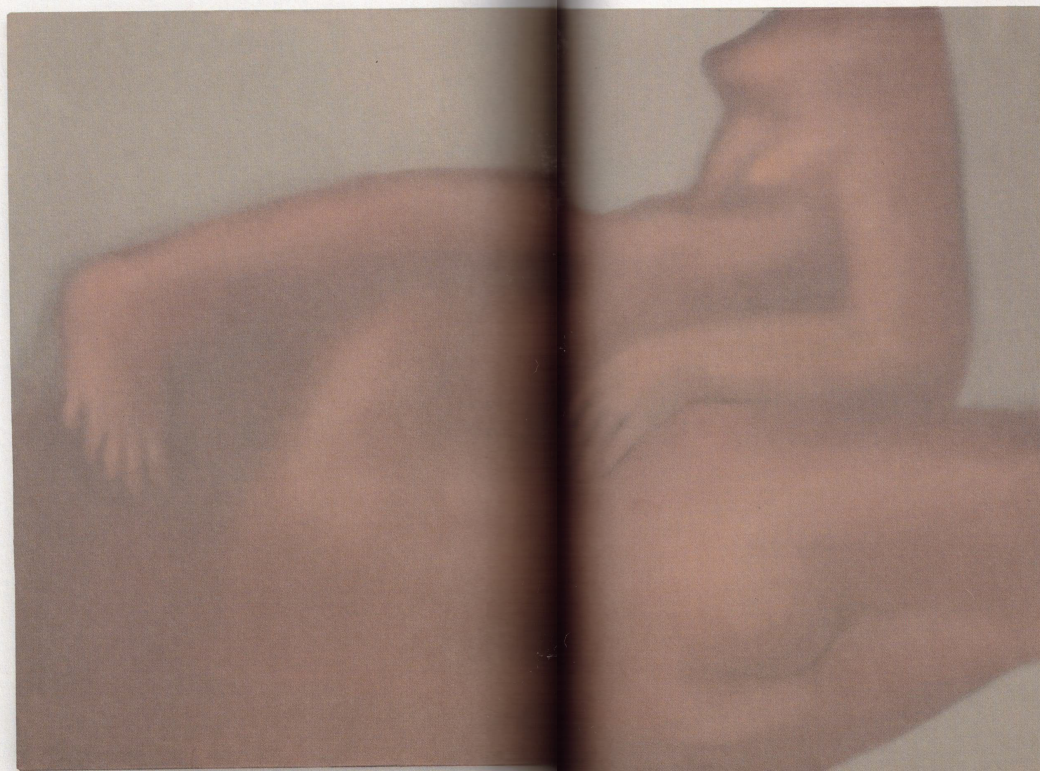
When I saw that performance last year at Bold Tendencies, I felt I couldn't put my emotions into words and it profoundly moved me. This also happens to me when I look at your paintings. If I had to describe my feelings with it, I would say that your paintings are intimidating and that some-





In the Bath, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 302h x 200w cm









The In Between, 2020, Acrylic on canvas 270h x 211w cm



times I even feel embarrassed to look at them.

That's interesting and really nice to hear. I have had people sharing their experiences with my paintings and everyone has a different response to them but that's a new one. It's not that I want people to feel intimidated but I want people to be confronted with some type of response that makes them feel something. This might be confused or conflictive which is something that I really like. I like the contradiction between things. So, it was nice to hear that.

If you could buy anyone else's art, whose would you love to own?

I love Chris Ofili's Dark Blue Paintings that are called The Blue Rider Paintings. They changed my understanding of this world. They are masterpieces, honestly. Since I saw them the first time I have been fascinated by how they create darkness within. They are so good. When you see them in the flesh because they are charcoal and oil paint, the blackness of the black charcoal with the gloss of that blue is amazing. They are really beautiful.

You had your first solo show with Peres Projects in Berlin and you are formally represented by Hannah Barry in London and Mine Projects in Hong Kong as well as have worked with other dealers all around the world. How has each gallery space affected the display of your work?

I work mainly with Hannah Barry, Mine Projects and Peres Projects as well as with other galleries without having representation. I like to keep it quite open specially because when a bigger gallery comes along and they want to do a show there is still that understanding between everyone that there isn't an ownership or restriction. Hannah and I have an amazing relationship where I am very committed to her program but also there is that freedom to work with more people. All spaces I have exhibited my work are very different. For example, Peres Projects is a beautiful

space and when you do a show there feels good with all the works. It has huge walls and nice lighting where anything will look great because it highlights the paintings. Other spaces are harder, specially when you cannot develop them in any way but it also becomes more challenging, although I am a painter and is always easier to curate shows.

Could you tell us about an unrealized project and explain the reasons why it never unfolded?

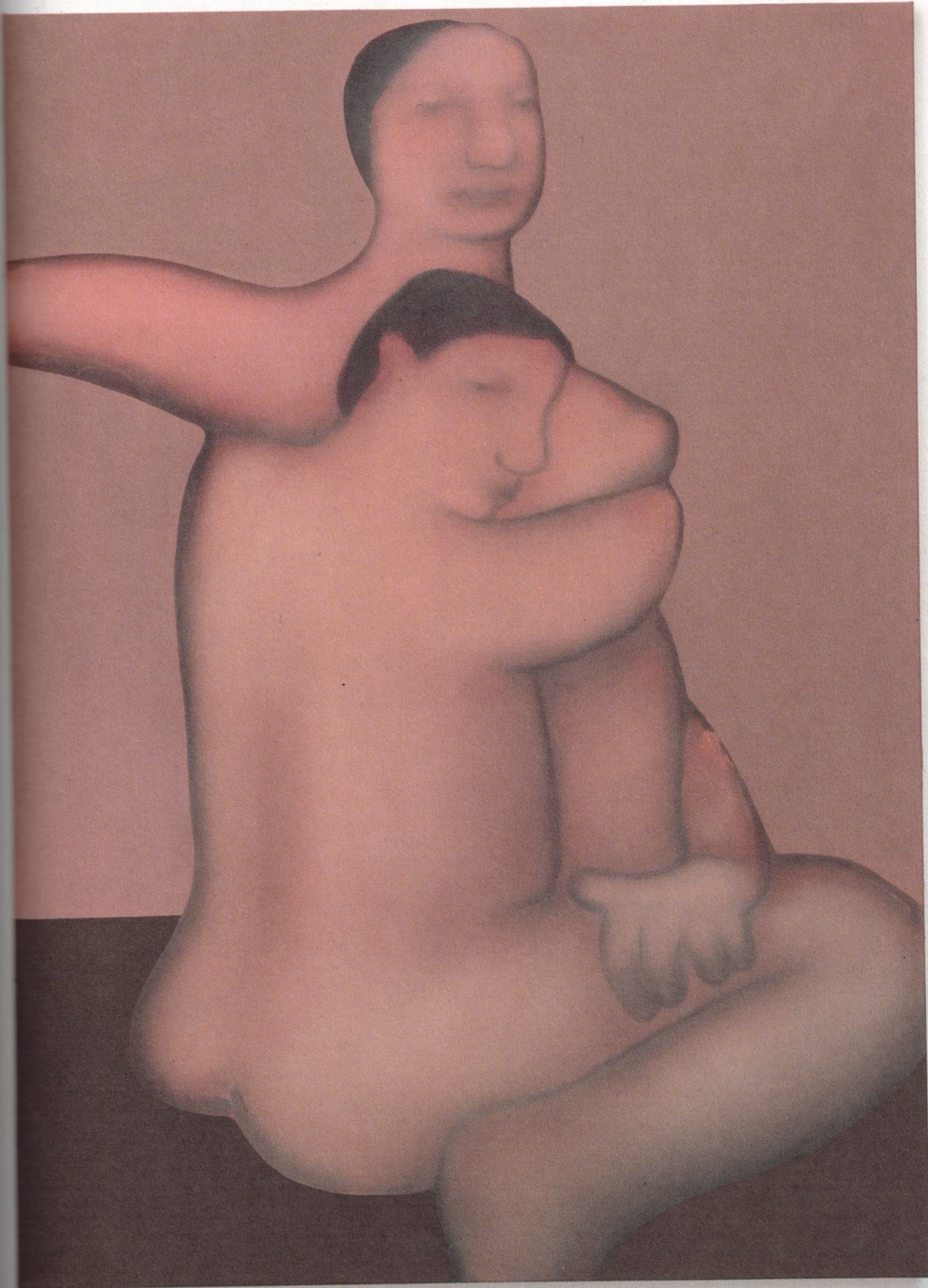
There is one that hasn't unfolded yet but before the lockdown I wanted to do a series of paintings upstairs at Hannah Barry which could resemble the idea of being in a room and looking out. I wanted to divide the upstairs gallery with a series of curtain paintings. The idea came looking at the way the light shines through my curtains throughout the day in my bedroom. It becomes very abstract looking and beautiful. I started thinking about making a series of curtain paintings that could transform the space of the gallery into an installation where you have them surrounding you in each side of the room. I want to explore the idea of transcendence and feeling the longing for something else and that sense of another space. However, with the coronavirus situation it might lose the whole idea of what the installation could be because it might feel too literal to the lockdown. I am not sure if this will be right for the show in September but it will happen another time if it doesn't happen now.



Front Facing, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 250h x 180w cm







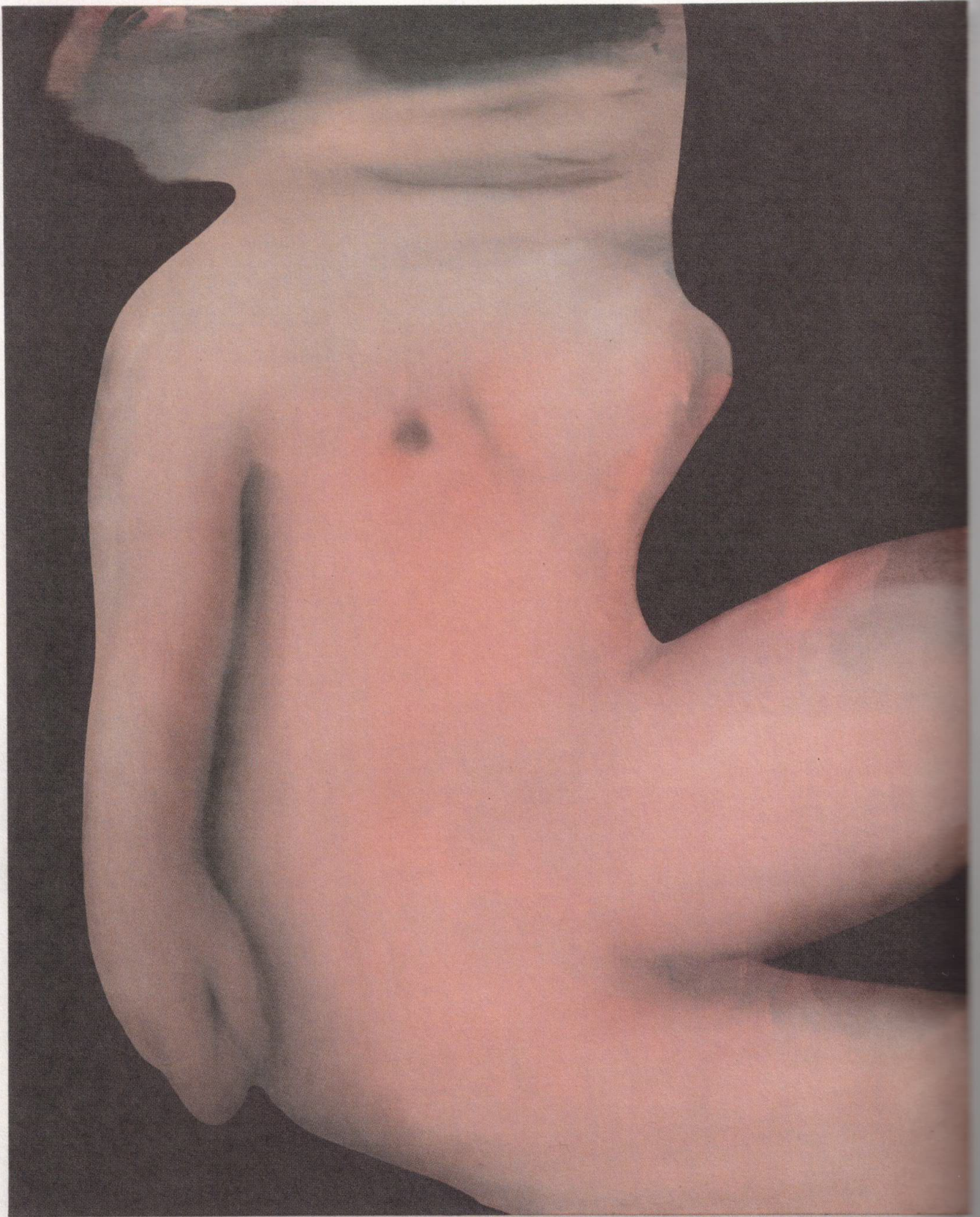
Comfort in Silence, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 250h x 180w cm



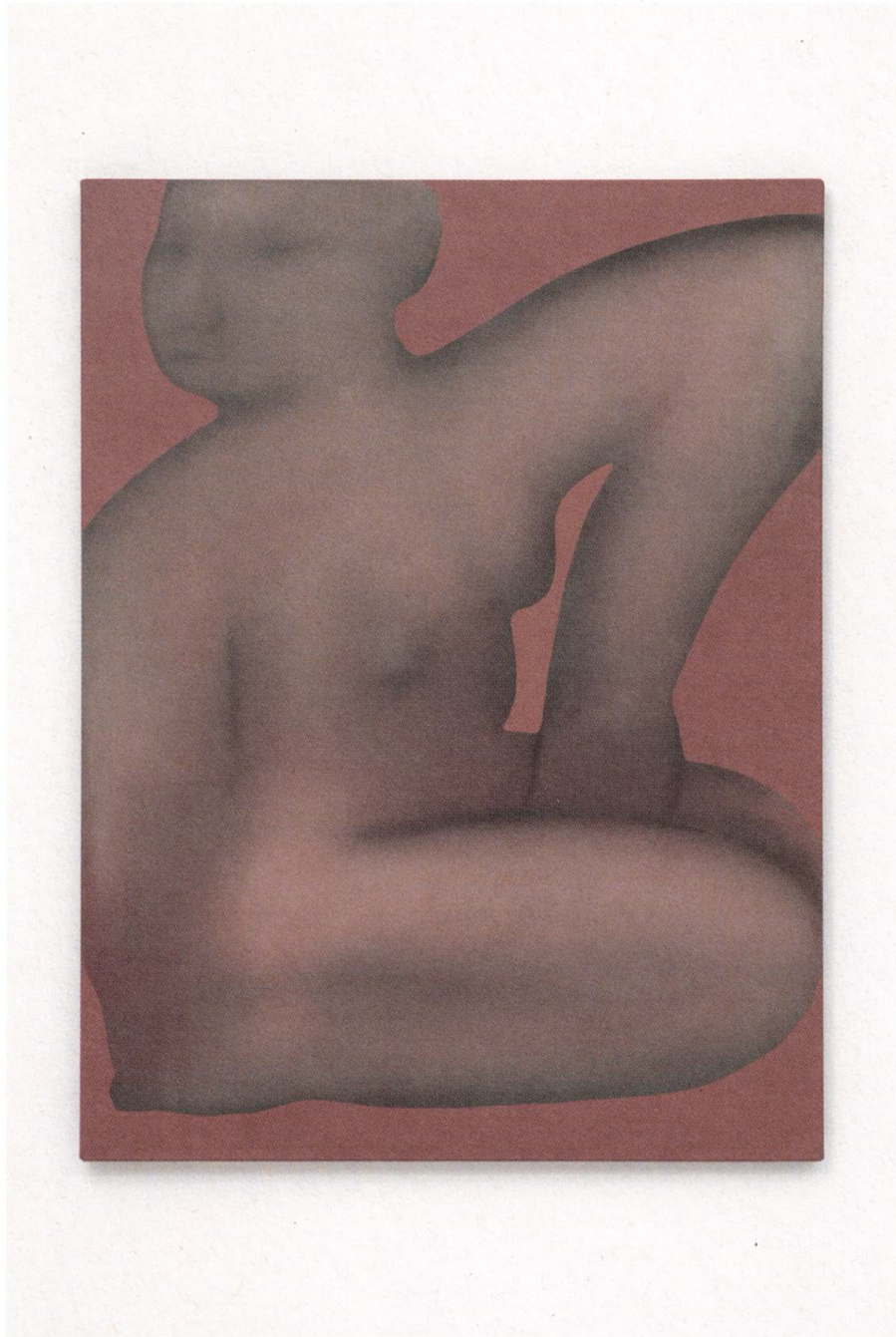


Falling Horse, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 211h x 301w cm









Between the Thighs, 2020 Acrylic on canvas 180h x 140w cm



