

CRITICS' PICKS ATHENS

Steven Shearer

The George Economou Collection
80, Kifissias Ave.

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Steven Shearer, *Potter*, 2021, oil on linen and artist's frame, 70 1/8 x 40".

The title of Steven Shearer's exhibition "Sleep, Death's Own Brother" reverberates from the almost seven-meter-wide wall piece *Sleep II*, 2015, a collage of hundreds of small photos depicting slumbering individuals. Some seem to be peacefully resting, while others appear lifeless, resembling corpses. This lurking presence of death pervades the entire exhibition, evident in thirty-seven small drawings and thirteen prominent

paintings like *The Sickly Fauve*, 2014, which shows a pale androgynous figure whose dark under-eye circles suggest they haven't seen sunlight for weeks.

Most of the displayed paintings feature an isolated, motionless figure, exuding an aura of Weltschmerz. Yet the figures' colorful environments contrast starkly with their dismal demeanors, as in *Potter*, 2021, where a mysterious red light emanates from a ceramicist's torso, permeating his upper body. Behind him, jars on shelves exhibit decorative winding lines, at times taking the form of preserved internal organs and flipping the mood from playful to gloomy. Here, it is the space *around* the figures that is dominant and delivers meaning. A bottle of wine conjures imagery of blood in *Atheist's Commission*, 2018, while undulating line work alludes to the style of Edvard Munch in *Man Sitting*, 2006. There is no fore- or background in the works; everything wants equal attention, both subject matter and mark-making. Even the frames are colored to echo the dynamic scenes.

Shearer's work draws from the long-haired heavy metal aesthetic and teenage memories of the '70s, while simultaneously reviving the early modern paintings of Munch or Paul Gauguin. The figures' gender fluidity breathes new life into these canonized aesthetics, imparting a contemporary feel to the work. Different eras and cultures thus blend in a dense and detailed painting style that seeks to amplify the character of the figures, granting them complexity rather than confining them to a singular identity.