

AARON MICHAEL SKOLNICK – YOUR VOICE LYING GENTLY IN MY EAR – INSTITUTE 193

Tyler Akers

Institute 193 features artists from the Southeastern United States, celebrating creatives from the ‘fly-over’ areas and the unique richness of their production. Their latest exhibition presents a grouping of paintings by Aaron Michael Skolnick, born and raised in Kentucky, and recently relocated in Hudson, New York. Before his move, he spent years taking care of his late husband, who was taken by complications related to the diagnosis of ALS. Their life together changed under the terms of the illness — looming frustration, selfless patience, and a delicate intimacy became their reality. The abundance of paintings he made during this period reflect this state of being, serving as a kinky film score, a gentle love song, and a requiem all at once. Two years have passed and Skolnick has moved into a new chapter in Hudson, painting more recent lovers with a fresh intensity but without forgetting his harrowing and tender memories.



ALL ARTWORK BY AARON MICHAEL SKOLNICK | COURTESY OF INSTITUTE 193



The paintings are mainly articulated in pastel hues; strokes and smudges are turned into smart details. His compositions are focused on scruffy bodies in repose, with seldom a background apart from a soft pillow. Sex acts become gestures of affection rather than carnal transactions, erotic but contemplative. Time is slowed down in the painted scenes, turned into a distant dream of golden light and soul connection. Apart from the portraits, Skolnick also paints still lifes: bedside vases of flowers. The age-old trope of cut flowers is framed by the context of the other sensual paintings, a symbol for inevitable decay and fading beauty that must be enjoyed in the moment or memorialized in art.

Though the work is not political on the surface, it has the potential to remind us how our bodies limit our experiences, particularly as members of the queer community. Under the pretense of being ‘safe-spaces,’ gay bars are often not places that are actively conscious of differently-abled bodies — wheel-chair accessible bars are very uncommon,

flashing lights and loud music alienate those with neurological disorders, and the cliquish hierarchies of strangers partying while staring over their plastic cups and cell phones do little to promote a sense of friendly inclusion. We are often tasked with creating our own spaces to feel the power of love, of community and partnership. Skolnick's paintings are evidence that he found that space and enjoyed it immensely, now generously sharing its intimacies with his viewers.

