



Hugh Steers: *Bath Curtain*, 1992, oil on canvas
71.94h x 60.13w in (182.73h x 152.73w cm)

Hugh Steers

January 12 – February 16, 2013

Alexander Gray Associates is pleased to present its first solo exhibition of works by Hugh Steers, featuring paintings and works on paper produced from 1987–1993. Throughout his career, cut dramatically short by AIDS at the age of 33, Steers was celebrated for his allegorical painting that captured the emotional and political tenor of New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly the impact of Queer identity and the AIDS crisis.

Dedicated to figurative painting despite a hostile artistic climate, Steers deliberately experiments with the role of beauty, manipulating the medium to create palpable tension between visual appeal and raw content. Familiar interior spaces—the bathroom and the bedroom—provide the stage for Steers' complex narratives. In *Purple Velvet Dress* (1989), delineations of real and imaginary, ego and alter-ego, eroticism and isolation become blurred. Later, in works from the 90s, anxiety and mortality grow in presence, haunting the corpulent figures and casting a brutal glow onto the scene. *Throat* (1991) takes a more literal stance, depicting the torture of anticipation as illness looms imminent.

At once biographical and allegorical, the intimate domestic scenes on view employ a style deeply rooted in art historical tradition to depict contemporary issues with extraordinary immediacy. Recalling his influential American predecessors, including Thomas Eakins, Paul Cadmus, Marsden Hartley, and Charles Demuth, Steers renders tenderness, isolation, intimacy, and psychological dilemma through dramatic use of color, skewed perspective, and radiant golden light.

About his commitment to painting, Steers notes:

I think that an artist's commitment to his or her medium is the first step among many in the making of art, and I believe it is based on all of the social and emotional factors that have affected the artist's development as an individual...painting records the immediacy and personal nature of the artist's touch. I think that this aspect of painting makes it ideally suited to the personal and humanistic character of my imagery.

—Hugh Steers, December 1994

Hugh Steers (1962–1995) was born in Washington, DC, and trained in painting at Yale University and Parsons School of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited at Richard Anderson, Midtown Galleries, the Drawing Center, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Denver Art Museum, and Albright-Knox Gallery, among others. Steers' work is in private and public art collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Denver Art Museum. A forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Steers' paintings and drawings will be organized by Visual AIDS.