

Victoria Miro

Emil Sands: *Watchmen*

Exhibition: 3 February–7 March 2026

Victoria Miro Venice, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Emil Sands
All Day Duchess, 2025
Oil on linen
153 x 127.5 cm
60 1/4 x 50 1/4 in
© Emil Sands
Courtesy the artist

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *Watchmen*, an exhibition of new paintings and works on paper by Emil Sands. Completed during a recent residency with the gallery in Venice, the works on view continue the artist's investigation into the relationship between viewer and subject while introducing new settings and an evolved psychological register. The exhibition is accompanied by new writing on the artist by Christopher Riopelle.

‘What is the relationship between flawed bodies and cultivated artifice? I am always interested in the dynamics of who gets to see what, and when.’ – Emil Sands

Emil Sands, a London-born painter and writer currently living in New York, explores the complex psychological territory between seeing and being seen. Through a focused exploration of physical form, gesture and the ways in which we present ourselves, consciously or not, Sands paints a world rich with both classical allusion and contemporary engagement. His paintings are at once portraits and landscapes; mindful of the codes and orthodoxies of both genres, he plays with their conventions while addressing themes of vulnerability and exposure drawn from personal experience.

Whereas recent works have focused on beach scenes or seascapes, where bodily freedoms are performed in a public arena, new paintings retreat into private realms. These formal settings, manicured spaces including gardens populated by classical statuary, bring a heightened psychological aspect, poised between interiority and exteriority, privacy and self-presentation, physical enclosure and bodily disclosure.

These worlds reveal themselves slowly through technique and composition: subtle gradations of colour and tonal shifts between warm and cool as the brush describes flesh, marble, foliage or water; the deployment of a decisive, if at times disorienting crop suggestive of a furtive or desirous glance. One painting features two figures, stilled in profile, as if aware of being watched. In another, we see a character taking a photograph of a topless figure. Sightlines activate *All Day Duchess* in which, staring directly at the viewer, a woman drapes herself on the ledge of a swimming pool; her pale skin and posture are reminiscent of classical sculpture while, seen in profile, an ancient bust, nose broken, eyes blank, dominates the foreground of the painting.

In these works, Sands asks, 'What does "posing" mean? Who has the power in these images? I don't have answers to these questions, but I was asking them while I was making the work.'

The residency and exhibition are part of our Miro Presents programme, which highlights the work of invited artists through solo presentations, curated exhibitions, artists' residencies and commissions, within both the physical and virtual spaces of the gallery.

About the artist

Emil Sands (born 1998 in London, currently living in New York) completed his Fine Art Foundation at Central Saint Martins, his BA and MPhil in Classics at the University of Cambridge, followed by the Henry Fellowship at Yale School of Art and Yale Creative Writing.

Solo exhibitions include Kasmin Gallery, New York; JO-HS, Mexico City; and Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York. Most recently his work has featured in the group exhibition *The Stories We Tell: Tidawhitney Lek, Emil Sands, Khalif Tahir Thompson*, held at Victoria Miro, London, November 2025–January 2026.

Sands' essay *Struck on one Side*, which focused on his experience growing up with cerebral palsy, was published in the March 2023 edition of *The Atlantic* magazine. He will publish his memoir *I Am Not Achilles* with Scribner (US) and Picador (UK) in 2026.

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