

TEMPLON



DAVID SMALLING

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ART & CULTURE

8 Must-See Solo Gallery Shows in April

From David Smalling's paintings using the visual language of the Old Masters to show how social rules and gender expectations influence identity to Jack Pierson's word sculptures and drawings crafted from sentiments and phrases collected throughout his life

BY PAUL LASTER

Rounding up the best gallery exhibitions across the United States each month, *Galerie* traveled from New York to Chicago and Los Angeles to highlight the top solo shows for April. From David Smalling's paintings using the visual language of the Old Masters to show how social rules and gender expectations influence identity and actions at Templon to Cheryl Popé's fabric landscape paintings that explore the spiritual and emotional significance of land as a space of memory, silence, and shared human experience at Monique Meloche and Jack Pierson's word sculptures and drawings crafted from sentiments and phrases collected throughout his life at Regen Projects, these are the not-to-be-missed shows this month.



David Smalling, *Cremaster*, (2025).

PHOTO: © CHARLES ROUSSEL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND TEMPLON

1. David Smalling | Templon, New York

A Jamaican-born, New York-based artist, **David Smalling** creates satirical and autobiographical figurative paintings that connect classical art history with contemporary social issues. While studying mathematics at Yale University, he took art classes at the Yale School of Art before earning a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard. Approaching painting with a blend of scientific and aesthetic views, he studied the properties of linen, canvas, and wood to find the best surface for each piece or series, and collaborated with a chemist at an Italian university to develop the color recipes he needed. Using both digital and traditional methods, he starts with a sketch, refines it, then creates a digital scan to produce Photoshop studies for the final piece, designing a composition on the computer that guides the detailed work in the studio.

In his debut at the gallery, Smalling investigates how cultural hierarchies and taboos shape identity by using the visual language of the **Old Masters** to show how social rules and gender expectations influence identity and actions. Focusing on detailed domestic and ceremonial scenes, he examines themes of belonging, aspiration, and restraint. Titled after the veterinary device that prevents pets from self-mutilation, his exhibition “Elizabethan Collar” features a new series of paintings that represent entry into a space offering safety and prestige while restricting freedom. Incorporating layered symbols of heteronormative expectations, such as pearls, ribbons, violins, and horns, his scenes suggest the presence of a woman or a man, with distortions and choke points indicating bodies—or identities—struggling to fit into incompatible roles simultaneously.

Through April 25
