TEMPLON

DAVID SMALLING

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From Kingston to Brussels: Jamaican-Born Painter David Smalling Turns Luxury Into Unease

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The Yale- and Harvard-trained artist heads to Brussels for his second solo show with Templon.

David Smalling, born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica, will open his second solo exhibition with Templon at the gallery's Brussels space on 12 November.

The New York-based painter is known for oil paintings that look sumptuous at first glance and grow quietly disturbing the longer you look, as Ayla Angelos describes in *Creative Boom*.

A Feast Without the Food

Smalling's canvases borrow the staging of a lavish dinner. In *Standing Ovation*, a French horn, a trumpet and a candelabrum sit tied in pink ribbon, with pearls spilling around them. In *No Jacket Required*, instruments occupy the place settings where a meal would be, joined by an open lipstick. Elsewhere, a candelabrum balances on towering stacks of mattresses, as in *Tallow* and *Supplemental Course*, turning a symbol of rest into something closer to an altar.

From Kingston to Yale and Harvard

Smalling moved to the United States in his late teens. He studied applied mathematics at Yale, trained at the Yale School of Art, and earned a PhD at Harvard. He says moving between social worlds sharpened his eye for the "unspoken codes that govern belonging."

His visual language draws on Mannerism, Early Netherlandish painting, and Dutch and Flemish still life, traditions in which everyday objects carried moral weight. Each work begins with an emotional tension or a phrase, then moves through drawings, colour tests and digital studies before being built up in layers of oil on wood panel. Smalling prefers not to dictate a reading, hoping instead that beauty draws viewers in before unease complicates the pleasure.

What's Next

His spring show, *Elizabethan Collar*, ran at Templon New York. Now he is developing a technique that brings modern fabrication into the tradition of copperplate engraving, inspired by Albrecht Dürer and Hendrick Goltzius, to explore what happens when a machine takes over part of the engraver's craft.

Source: Ayla Angelos, "David Smalling turns mattresses, pearls and instruments into something unsettling and uneasy," Creative Boom, 15 October 2026.