***Intermission***

**Joanna van Son**

**28 February – XX March, 2025**

General Assembly is pleased to present *Intermission*, Joanna van Son’s debut solo exhibition with the gallery. Born in Oman to Venezuelan-Irish and Dutch parents, van Son’s paintings are undeniably striking. Central to their magic is their visceral, tactile quality: thick impastos of paint are harmoniously juxtaposed with thinly painted expanses of linen and canvas. Van Son’s mellifluous compositions call to mind Cecily Brown’s gestural, dynamic abstractions and the structural intensity of Frank Auerbach’s impasto-laden paintings. Pastel pinks, rich browns and luscious flesh tones collide with greens, reds, and blacks to create pictures that necessitate closer examination.

In the eight paintings included in *Intermission*, van Son presents portraits of herself and her fiancé, Lilah. Though deeply connected, the couple is physically divided—Joanna in London, Lilah in New York. This longing for closeness permeates the paintings. The exhibition’s title is inspired by this geographic separation, alluding to the pause between moments activity, or in this case togetherness. The paintings memorialize moments of physical closeness as well as separation, often collapsing time and depicting several moments simultaneously. They are carefully considered, with each layer of paint divulging the intimacy and tenderness she feels towards her subject.

Van Son's paintings begin as charcoal or graphite drawings on raw canvas, traces of which remain visible beneath thick impasto. The drawing is often an iterative practice, where the artist works out the problems and experiments with compositions. For van Son, this base layer creates a support upon which the subsequent layers can rest, like the structural steel of a skyscraper. From there she adds paint, often using a single brush for an entire painting. In this layering process, van Son creates a rich sense of depth and space in her pictures.

Indeed, explorations of space have been key to the development of van Son’s practice. Originally trained in architecture, van Son applies an architect’s structured approach to space. Yet, while architects must work within the limits of scale and feasibility, she revels in the freedom of the two-dimensional plane, playing with spatial logic to suit her emotional and formal explorations. While works such as *Perched* and *Head First* depict full figures in a scale that is more legible to the viewer, the imposing *Ribs to Know* and the smaller *Fragments* series appear more purely abstract. However, these works depict the same scenes found in the more discernable compositions, only at a larger, more tightly composed scale. At this scale, the larger scene dissolves, drawing the viewer into pure color, composition, and brushwork.

Van Son’s goal is to create images that defy fixed interpretation. She achieves this by playing with time, space, and scale. For her, ambiguity is essential. She invites the viewer into a space where meaning is multi-faceted, evoking a sense of discovery, reflection, and even disorientation. The shifting perspectives and fragmented forms disrupt visual clarity, fostering a productive confusion that compels the viewer to look longer, question more deeply, and engage with the work on an intuitive level.

Joanna van Son (b. 2000) lives and works between London and New York. She was born in Oman to Venezualan-Irish and Dutch parents, and grew up in China, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Van Son completed an architecture degree from the Bartlett Faculty of Built Environment. Her practice consists of painting, drawing, and draftsmanship.