

**PRESS RELEASE: 4 May 2020**

Lionel Smit

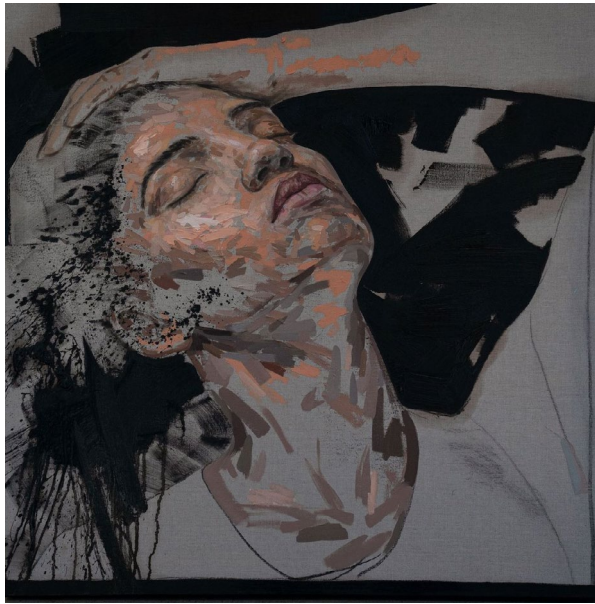
**'VERSO'**

at Everard Read Cape Town

13 May 2020

The exhibition will be hosted online.

<https://www.everard-read-capetown.co.za/>



*Verso, 2020, oil on linen, 100 x 100cm*

**For further press information and images:**

Veronica Kotze

+27 (21) 205 6867

[veronica@lionelsmit.co.za](mailto:veronica@lionelsmit.co.za)

Lionel Smit Studio

[www.lionelsmit.com](http://www.lionelsmit.com)

**For inquiries at the gallery:**

Emma Van Der Merwe

+27 73 311 5832

[emma@everard.co.za](mailto:emma@everard.co.za)

Landline: +27 21 418 4527

Charles Mobile (after hours): +27 83 450 0915

3 Portswood Road, Waterfront, Cape Town, SA

Falling under the title Verso, this solo exhibition by Lionel Smit explores and celebrates the tactile nature of oil painting – its ability to render something visible and touchable that was seen or experienced.

Stemming from early Latin roots, the term verso means reverse. In an art historical context, it can refer to the left-hand page of an open manuscript (the verso folio), while a work of art can also be signed on the verso, meaning that an artist prefers to sign their work on the back. The term always makes sense in relation to its counterpart – the recto – which is the immediate front or the first encounter, so to speak. The verso is the side of a leaf (as of a manuscript) or a surface (such as a canvas) that is to be read second and seen later. The verso demands a different form of contemplation, as it is that which is not always immediately obvious.

In his latest body of work, Smit is engaging with the tactility of the painterly medium and its ability to reference the texture and elasticity of human skin. The models who feature in his recent paintings are rendered in bold brushwork and thickly impastoed colour. Smit's keen interest in the visual components – the marks, lines and smudges – that make up the human countenance is clearly evident, as he uses his paintings as a means to trace (and test) the structure of the human face.

In some areas of the canvas, densely worked layers of colour are concentrated together, with Smit's palette veering towards tonalities that remind of earth and flesh. Using the impasto technique, Smit often lays paint on the surface of the canvas in very thick layers, to such a degree that it almost seems as if the colour is seeping from the painting itself. The textured surfaces that he creates are immediately visceral, and reminds of the texture of human skin with its folds, crevices and protrusions. These corporeal, sensual moments are, however, carefully balanced with moments of sparsity and stillness, as the density of the painted areas lie in perfect counterform to the unpainted areas where the linen surface of the canvas is still visible. The raw texture of the linen – with its own distinctive patina and grain – makes for the perfect visual companion to the painted areas. Paint and canvas, colour and texture, all work together to give form to the female face.

This exhibition is, above all, an appeal to the tactile nature of art and its production. His work speaks strongly against the isolation that many humans are experiencing right now, and it is a balm against the feelings of loss and separation that permeate our present condition. His work is an urgent reminder of our desire to touch, and one cannot look at his paintings without recognising that our ability to feel is as much an emotional response as it is a tactile experience. As John Keats reminds us, "touch has a memory". And it is exactly this memory that Smit is calling to the fore – the memory of touching and tracing a face.

*Dr Ernst van der Wal, PhD (Visual Arts)  
Senior Lecturer: Visual Arts  
Stellenbosch University*