

reflective redactions:
review of katie butler's RE[d]ACTIVE
at gallery 1888

Gallery 1888 latest exhibition *RE[d]ACTIVE*, a solo show of Katie Butler's contemplative paintings. Butler's diaristic works are intimate glimpses into romantic relationships, impulse, and inner reflections. The show is comprised of bedroom scenes, commutes home, and quotidian details of the everyday. Each painting is accompanied by a journal entry, hung alongside in a frame. Over the course of the exhibition, a portion of the texts have been redacted, concentrating or modifying the spirit of the paintings.



Figure 1: Exhibition review of *Re[d]active* at Gallery 1888.

The first pairing includes the large painting, *Bliss* (2024). The subject is a woman in a white eyelet dress with long satin gloves. Her platinum hair and dewy skin, along with the sheen of the satin gloves, demonstrate Butler's affinity for dynamic uses of light. The subject rests her head along the front paw of a tiger, being a little spoon to the large predator. In the background are finer details of a home: foliage wallpaper, floral prints in gilded frames, reflections of the window as the light source, and the bedding upon which the tiger and woman rest. Juxtaposed with the surreal fixture of a tiger, the painting carries the spirit of a dream. The text alongside the painting is one that reflects upon how the self is perceived:

**If he had a journal of all the thoughts he can't clear from
his mind, would I be all over those pages too? And if I see
him again, will he look at me the same?**

Thinking about the content of the painting and the nature of the journal entry, it prompts reflection on whether how we exist and how others experience us align. Further complicating the situation is thinking about all the things we dread others seeing in ourselves, or conversely, how we aspire to be. The combination of the journal entry and the painting recognizes that these thoughts are woven together when we contemplate our relationship dynamics.



Figure 2: Katie Butler. *Bliss*, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 26 inches.

Threads and ribbons are found throughout the exhibition in the forms of painted motifs and the integration as mixed media. Within *By Your Side* (2026) and *Honey* (2026) subjects are tethered by a red satin ribbon. The former has the ribbon tying two wrists together as they stand side-by-side, each knotting the bow. Meanwhile in *Honey*, two people sit in a living room, one on a couch, the other seated on the floor by the arm of the couch. As they sit, the man reads from a book while the woman writes in a notebook. She has a red ribbon tied in her hair. Following the crimson thread, it winds its way towards the couch, up the man's shoulder, and along the pages of his book. As they passively spend time together, it is noticeable that the man in the pair does not share a tied knot. Instead, his end of the ribbon drapes over the spine of his reading material, as if a bookmark to which he will return.



Figure 3:Katie Butler. *Honey*, 2026. Oil on canvas, 30 x 48 x 3.1 inches.

Whereas within *Loose Ends* (2023), Butler utilizes a variety of yarn in shades of green to create depth, using the strands to depict a duvet with folds and differences in lighting. The duvet surrounds the painted subject as they rest on their side in bed. The yarn and duvet makes its way outwards from the focal point and extends beyond the frame of the panel, embodying the “loose ends” of the title. When returning to the exhibition weeks later, the redacted text succinctly captured the anguish in recognizing someone that could unravel one's growth, another interpretation of a ‘loose end’:

[REDACTED] I needed to hurt him to feel as badly as I did. Nothing he could've done to me would have made me as upset [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Having him in my life in any capacity freezes time. I will not heal, I will still live for his validation & compromise my needs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I miss myself.

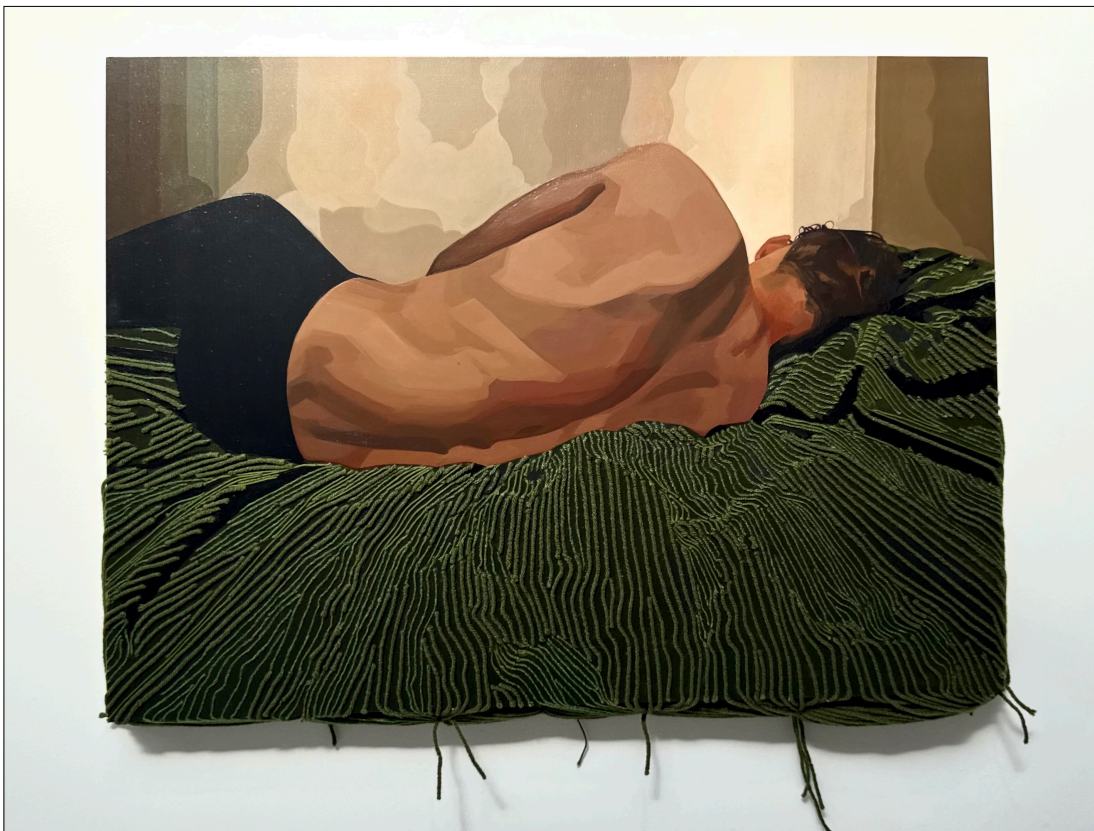


Figure 4: Katie Butler. *Loose Ends*, 2023. Acrylic and yarn on wood panel, 22 x 30 inches.

Particularly mesmerizing is Butler's *Hold On* (2022), a black figurative portrait with hands tracing a corporeal outline. The hands surround the absent (while simultaneously present) body: caressing the nape of the neck, grasping the chest, clutching the thighs. On the more sexual end of the kinds of touch included is a heavily veined hand with a ring adorned, seemingly engaging in vaginal penetration. Rendering the primary subject at the focal point incidentally through the myriad hands puts the focus on the touch experienced. The variety of touches form a visual diary of the ways in which bodies remember, and how those experiences form the basis of future interactions. The visual priority becomes the hands and, drawing upon the text alongside, reckoning with losing grasp of the self and instead building a version through one's romantic interest. Diary entries of *Close to You* (2021) and *Hold On* (2022) could apply here:

FIRST ENTRY:

**It's fun to be fun
It's easy to be easy**

**It's sad to be sad
and mean to be mean
and too much to be more**

so I'm fun. I am easy. I am a fraction of myself for you

SECOND ENTRY, SELECTED EXCERPT:

But why is my potential the ability to be loved? And why does loving harder & harder make me less deserving? Everyday I work subconsciously to be better suited to him & each day my purpose outside of him stinks. And then you wake up one day & you feel so alone in the company of your best friends & he's your biggest inspiration & your only goal is to be the world's best supporting actress. And you wonder how you get back from here.



Figure 5: Katie Butler. *Hold On*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 24 inches.

Butler's experimentation takes on a different air within *All I See Is Red* (2026), as the artists incorporate text along the outer frame of the canvas in addition to displaying the painting on a low plinth. The installation amplifies the immersive aspect of the work, as if viewers are walking into a room in which the subject sits, surrounded by many objects, lights, and sights deeply saturated in reds. Since the subject is on the ground resting their back along the floor, looking downwards feels natural as if we are entering the room in which they are situated. A small television for karaoke sits in the background of the crowded room: "I loved my rose tinted glasses" plays out across the screen. Butler utilizes text within the painting, along the outer frame of the painting ("NOW. ALL I SEE IS RED." repeated), and in an accompanying journal entry paired as part of the work. Butler's various inclusions of text function 1) within the context of subject and environment 2) an emphasis framing the artwork, along with the title 3) an autobiographical incorporation through the inclusion of journal entries detailing the feeling of rage:

SELECTED EXCERPT:

I loved my rose tinted glasses. But now the white lies are gone and I'm seeing red.

This multiplicity of inclusions can be brought back to seeing red versus rose tinted glasses. What's the difference between red and rose? Both are used to communicate emotion that clouds one's experience, out of anger or infatuation. Be it anger or love, we are dominated by emotion.



Figure 6: Katie Butler. *All I See Is Red*, 2026. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches.

Tucked in the corner of the gallery with the *Affirmations* (2026) series is Butler's *And Still* (2025), installed on a mirror panel. Like other paintings within the exhibition, the setting is within a bed, surrounded by a duvet and deep in thought. The subject sits up slightly against pillows staring outwards to the left of the canvas. The lighting within the painting mimics that of a sunrise, with cool blue tones and warm streaks of peach and cream. The textures of the duvet transition into the surface of water, ridges and ripples extending downwards to the base of the painting. Installing the work upon a mirror amplifies the reflective elements within the painting, compounded by depicting a subject in a moment of reflection.



Figure 7: Katie Butler. *And Still*, 2026. Oil on canvas, 42 x 30 inches.

The reflections upon reflections is a fitting close to Butler's solo show *RE[d]ACTIVE*. The artist's paintings from the past years reflect technical and creative growth, integrating a variety of materials, approaches to canvas and panel, in addition to changes in subject matter. The journal entries demonstrate the emotional turmoil of navigating relationships, ideas of the self, and desires to grow on a personal level. While the act of redaction takes it a step further, obfuscating vulnerability in addition to seeking the essence of the entries. In an age of artifice and manufacturing the self to be most palatable, Butler's show at Gallery 1888 appeals to and satiates the desire for something raw and good.

RE[d]ACTIVE

Katie Butler

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June 20, 2026 - July 18, 2026