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# Kevin T. Leong's: An Artist Introduction, Studio Shop Gallery



Studio Shop Gallery, Burlingame, CA  
On View March 1-15, 2026

By Shrey Purohit

Kevin Leong's large figurative paintings hang in a 110-year-old gallery space in Burlingame, a building with a big hall and an adjoining room right on the main street downtown. It's the kind of space that gives paintings room to breathe, and Kevin's work fills it without overwhelming it. This is his first large gallery solo show outside of San Francisco after exhibitions at Upper Market Gallery and Ingleside Gallery, and it feels like a real arrival.



What strikes you first is the scale, these paintings pull you in from across the room.. The figures are abstracted just enough that you can't quite pin down a face, which does something interesting: it turns every person in every scene into someone you might know. A woman on a couch could be your friend. The couple at dinner could be you and the person you were with last weekend. Kevin's paintings have that rare quality of feeling both deeply personal and completely inviting to whoever's looking.

The Gallery's Curator Monica LaStaiti mentioned that she was immediately drawn to how Kevin's narratives feel like shared experiences; memories or moments we can all relate to. "I'm also attracted to the flow and balance of color and form that effortlessly brings your eye into the painting and throughout the work," she said. "His entry points invite you in in such a way as to be a part of that moment, and his brushstrokes elicit an ambiguity and energy to the scene."



Kevin T. Leong, *White Sweater*, Oil on linen, 26 x 24 inches

I spent a while talking with Kevin and his wife Sarah in the gallery, learning the backstories behind different scenes. Some are pulled from life and some are memories filtered through that haze that makes the past feel more vivid and less precise at the same time. Knowing the stories is enriching, but making up your own works just as well. The way paint is laid down thick in some passages and pulled thin in others, creates a sense of openness which builds an intrigue and curiosity within me and leads me to want to read the label, exhibition text and learn more about what Kevin was thinking.

A few pieces caught my eye in particular. There's a series of meta gallery scenes (Gallery, 34 x 32 in; Gallery 2, 50 x 56 in; Gallery 3, 34 x 40 in; Gallery 4, 12 x 14 in; Gallery 5, 20 x 18 in). Paintings of people looking at paintings that have a quiet humor and self-awareness to them. You see figures milling around a white-walled room, absorbed in art or absorbed in each other, and the whole thing becomes a mirror of what you're doing right now, standing in this gallery looking at this painting. Then there's the recurring female figure who threads through much of the work. (After RD, 30 x 32 in; Swimmer, 52 x 48 in) I'd speculate that's Sarah, though Kevin doesn't spell it out, and the ambiguity is part of what makes those paintings stick. She appears in domestic moments, seated in a chair, caught in a gesture sipping her coffee, rendered with a tenderness that comes through in the brushwork itself.



Kevin T. Leong, *Gallery 2*, Oil on linen, 50 x 56 inches



Kevin T. Leong, *Swimmer*, Oil on canvas, 52 x 48 inches

That paint handling is worth talking about. Across paintings, particularly in the painting (*Striped Shirt*, 52 x 48 in), 4 figures, surrounding a table, where the viewer seated next to a lady with hand gestures hinting to a deep conversation is peering into. Here Kevin works with a range of touch that keeps your eye moving. Some areas are built up with heavy, almost sculptural strokes. Others are swept clean, barely there, like the image is dissolving at the edges. It gives every painting a sense of time passing within the frame, like you're watching a memory form and fade simultaneously. There's a real confidence in knowing when to push and when to leave something alone, and Kevin has that.



Kevin T. Leong, *Striped Shirt*, Oil on canvas, 52 x 48 inches

His work reminds me of Elmer Bischoff and Richard Diebenkorn, all while adding to that lineage in a meaningful way. The Bay Area figurative painters were speaking the same language, finding the figure through the paint, letting atmosphere and color carry as much emotional weight as the subject itself. Kevin isn't imitating that tradition, but he's clearly in conversation with it, and his paintings feel like a contemporary extension of those same instincts. The warmth of interior light, the intimacy of two people at a table, the way a room can hold a feeling Kevin understands all of that.



Kevin T. Leong, *Gold Lamp*, Oil on linen, 36 x 34 inches

Sometimes art gets so wrapped up in concept or material that it forgets to be inviting. Kevin's paintings are the opposite. They're approachable without being simple, emotional without being sentimental, and generous in how much room they leave for you to bring your own life to them. This show is worth the trip to Burlingame.