

Landon Martinez
July,26,2023



Salman Toor, *Two Citizens*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4 cm). © Salman Toor. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. Photo: Farzad Owrang.

Toor.

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Unrequited Love on Canvas

Salman Toor is a 40-year-old artist who blends themes of queer love, immigrant identity, and echoes of the past in his vibrant and wild paintings. Toor is an American-born Pakistani artist who is based in New York. He describes himself as a gay fem man who grew up in a homophobic culture, who is now “annoyingly free” as he states in his interview with Art21. His work is included in the Hill Art Foundation exhibition, *Beautiful, Vivid, and Self-contained* curated by David Salle. *Two Citizens* is a painting made up of oil on canvas, and it depicts the overall theme of the painting, the harsh truth of what it is like to have to love someone silently because the love cannot be returned. Whether that is due to stigma, sexuality, or unrequited love as a whole.

In the first view of the painting, viewers get to see diagonal lines for the background, as well as colors of peach, blue, green, white, orange, brown, navy blue, and black. These colors bring us a playful undertone of the painting despite the uncomfortable theme. While looking at the male figures we see that they are in the motion of being joined at the hand, and the genitals of the figures are out. This is to create vulnerability and an unapologetic self within the painting. Breaking down the figure to the left, we see that he is holding what appears to be an empty green flag. It is empty to show that his actions or intentions are okay in his head, but they are not thought through. They have not been figured out fully. His eyes are shown looking at the figure to the right, or the hand of the other figure. His lips are slightly turned down at the end, signifying dissatisfaction or a feeling of upset. The figure to the right also has his genitals out and is looking straight at the viewer creating a sense of discomfort. He also has a clown nose which is common for Toor’s work, but one can’t help but feel that it is placed there intentionally

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as a way to depict ignorance. With no doubt though, one cannot deny this situation brings discomfort or sorts and pushes the boundaries of what one might think a love story should be.

Two Citizens is a painting that consists of many colors to tell the story of “queer desire,” a common theme in Toor’s works, as referenced in the book *No Ordinary Love*. The piece, *Two Citizens*’ foundation is about two men who seem to be in the action of joining hands. Though the figure to the left seems to be the one who is making the effort to act on this unrequited love, in contrast, the figure to the right seems disinterested, or rather uncertain. The color palette of this piece may seem to have a deeper meaning, that of love, uncertainty, and a lack of a direct location where this uncomfortable interaction is taking place. Just like Toor’s other work we get to see repetition or notable elements that are presented within his body of work is that of figures that are depicted in vulnerable positions, and that show vulnerability. This point is brought up to bring awareness to the fact that Toor creates narratives of uncomfortable situations. Toor’s biography reveals his inclination to “create allegorical spaces of waiting, anticipation, and apprehension; border crossings into a world that may not be welcoming.” We see this perfectly depicted in *Two Citizens*.

Two Citizens is an uncomfortable story of unrequited love between two people who are in different places in life. The love that could have been only shown in one person, while the other is depicted as uninterested and uncomfortable with this thought. Based on the continuous narrative, we can assume this is what Toor wanted to do with this piece.

Bibliography

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1. Salman Toor, *Two Citizens*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4 cm). © Salman Toor. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. Photo: Farzad Owrang.
2. Art 21. "Salman Toor's Emerald Green. Art21 'New York Close Up.'" Art 21. 17 Nov. 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXrnwA1z0w0.
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