

"The nicest thing about feeling happy is that you think you'll never be unhappy again," says Louis Molina, the imprisoned gay man in the 1985 political drama *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Happiness, like other thrills, is a lingering one—the kind that stretches its sticky web across the everyday, delusional and ecstatic. Anthony Cudahy's paintings in "Coral Room," his solo exhibition at Hales Gallery, possess a similar gossamer air. He weaves a range of emotions into his figures' contemplative postures and lucid backdrops, endowing them with enigmatic anchors.

Webs in Cudahy's paintings are literal forces, too; they sprout ghostly geometries from the canvas' corners or tops. In the spring-colored *Duo with web* (2021), two men—Cudahy and his partner—echo one another, convincing me in the blink of an eye of their mirrored likeness. Rather, they gaze at opposite ends of the painting, donning shirts in similar shades of aquatic green and blue. A web hovers above their heads like a thought bubble or a relentless memory. The silky web glues two lovers despite their drifted stares.

*Anti-bausor tree (protected sleepers, wolf's-bane and spider around)* (2021) represents the Western painting's canonized "sleeping woman" figure, veiled here with the mystery about the couple's repose: Are two men napping after a day's hike in foliage-rich nature? Did they succumb to the venom of the forest's poisonous berries? Or is seeking a mundane reasoning to painterly musing simply futile? Regardless, the two bodies' harmonious repose recalls the two matching clocks in Felix Gonzales-Torres's quietly homoerotic *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1987–91). In Cudahy's painting, two lovers—one facedown and the other upright—form an X with their perfectly stretched bodies over one another. They're drenched in purple, green, and yellow flora; the air seems crisp. Two momentous webs on the horizon substitute for the sun sinking into green hills in summer dusk. Omnipresent yet humble, the webs in this painting, as well as similarly in the small-scale *Jug i* (2021), are faint in appearance and mysterious in function. When it hides behind a ruby jug, the grayish grid functions as the vessel's long-cast shadow. Stepping in for the sun or a shadow, its ethereal smear strives to delineate the fleeting fickle moment.

The tiny *Red spider* (2021), hung on a column close to the gallery's ceiling, simply shows the fanged arachnid, its eight legs curved within the minuscule canvas over a coral-red background. Demure and wise, the spider is aloof to the bodies below—happy, baffled, desiring. Cudahy's painterly universe is connected with air-thin tissues of emotionality, the precariousness of the moment, and resilience in claiming a feeling despite our innate human knowledge of its impending slippage. Each painting seemingly freezes a moment against the gushing flow of time: a gaze, a posture, or gesture. Beyond the eye, however, they expand to those instants' peripheries, both chronologically and emotionally. The painter's fluid command over his material captures this cruel fluidity of time and feeling, opening the window for potentials beyond the physicality of the canvas. —*Osman Can Yerebakan*