

# GALERIE LESSIRARD

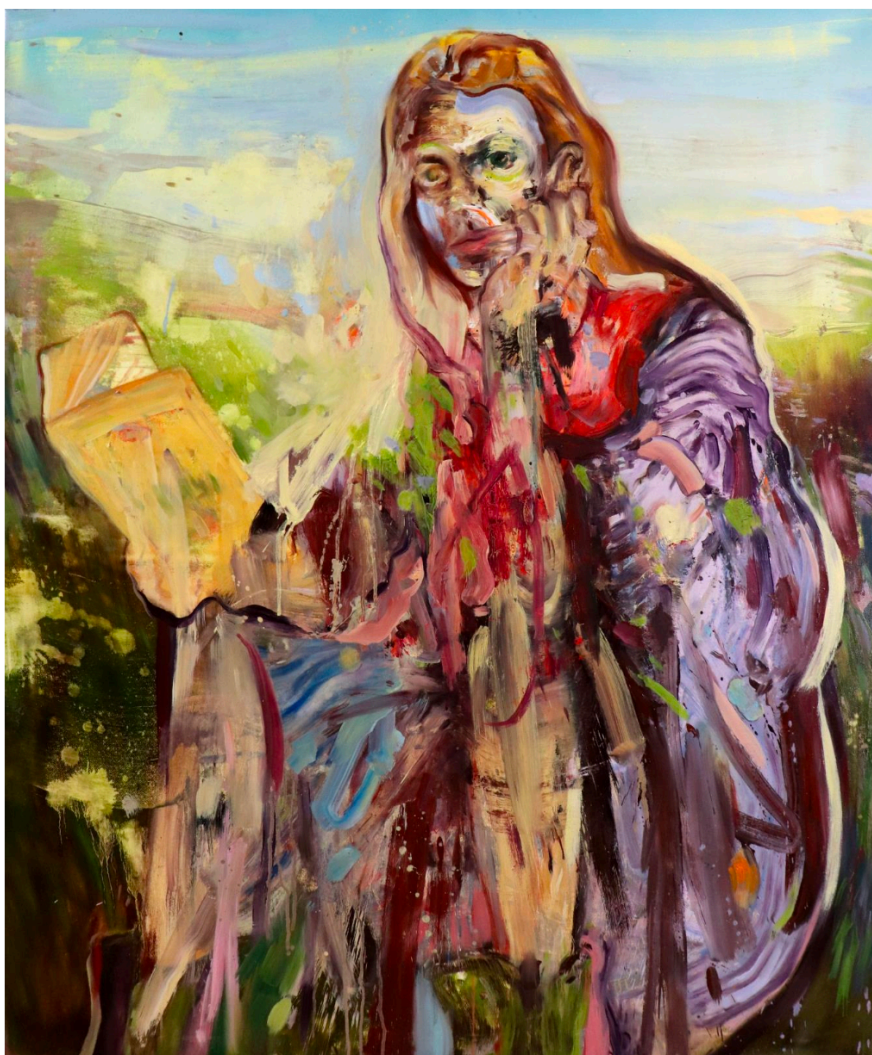
## ART ANALYSIS

November 2025

## LEONARDO VARGAS

### *THE EMBODIED GAZE*

By Marie-Pierre LESSIRARD



Leonardo VARGAS, Liseuse,  
*Oil on canvas, 120x100 cm.*

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At first glance, "The Reader" presents itself as an encounter with uncertainty; nothing is offered outright except the suggestion of a figure, suspended in the fluid interplay of colour and substance.

*But what, indeed, is a figure when the painterly gesture seems at once to reveal and to erase it?*

Here, flesh is neither mere decoration nor surface: it emerges from a rupture, in the tension between line and blur, torn from the background as one might wrench a memory from a dream. Francis Bacon encapsulated this challenge: "to paint the flesh of the soul." In other words, to express within paint's very substance the tragic resonance and vulnerability inherent to every body.

And yet, against this controlled chaos, Leonardo Vargas offers a veiled gentleness, a striving for recomposition: the body of the reader, diffracted by light and the impetus of the brush, persists in the density of sensation, suspended in the liminal space between presence and absence.

This dynamic recalls Giacometti, for whom "the great adventure is seeing something unknown emerge every day, in the self-same face." Form remains ever in the making, always unfinished, as if caught in the act of vanishing.

But what is most striking here is the gaze the reader lifts—not to her book, but to the one who observes her. She addresses, invites the viewer into the space of the canvas.

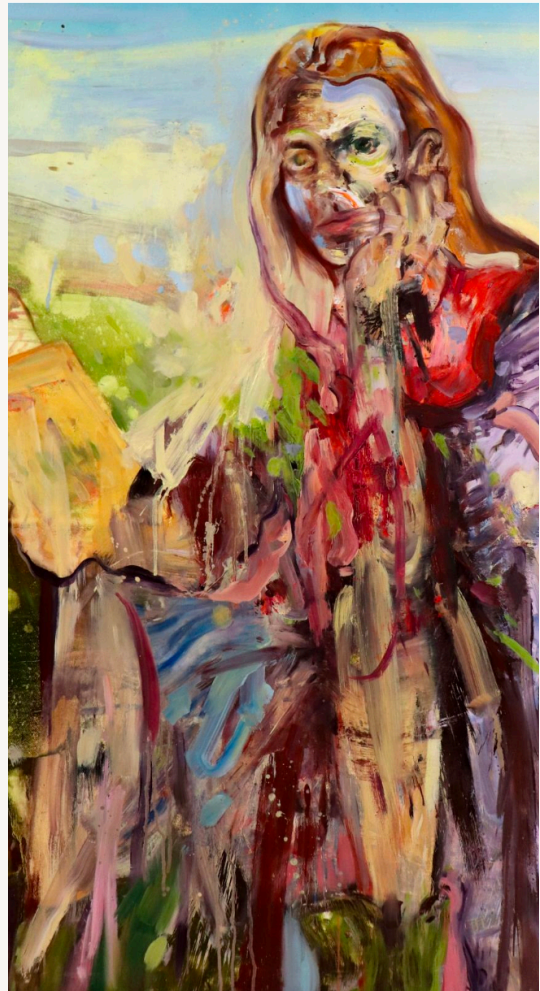
Thus, the act of visually reading becomes a phenomenology: form arises from the slow, silent encounter between two presences.

It is here that Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" finds its fullest meaning. Flesh, he explains, is not merely bodily substance: it is the very tissue of relationship between the subject and the world. It "brings forth" the world to perception, opening a realm of shared thickness between that which touches and that which is touched. This "flesh of the world" is the ground from which all visibility gains substance—the living matter in which the sensible and the spirit come together and respond to one another.

Confronted with this figure, absorbed in its closeness to the viewer, flesh is experienced precisely through its own incompleteness; it becomes a threshold, a boundary, a space of passage.

With Vargas, there is neither mutilation nor outcry: rather, a slow meditation on presence, a suspended tempo in which consciousness seeks a resting place, where soul barely brushes against matter.

And it is the soul, indeed, that appears here in the fissure, in the mist. It is not some external aura; it lingers within the texture of hues, tarrying in the tension of the gaze.



This is precisely what phenomenology offers: the artwork does not exhaust itself in representation, but instead grants access to an ineffable utterance, where subjectivity resonates in coloured flesh, in the ambiguity of contour, in the patience of gesture

It is within this very movement between flesh and soul, between the visible and the invisible, that Georges Didi-Huberman's thought is inscribed:

*« We find ourselves before images as before strange things that alternately open and close to our senses—whether we understand 'senses' in terms of sensation or of meaning [...]. From this perspective, then, the opening of the image is offered as a metaphor for spiritual interiority. »*

Before this reader, the viewer is no longer merely opposite but rather drawn within, invited to experience for themselves the coexistence of flesh and soul—that point of passage where painting makes manifest the evidence of a life at once fragile, indefinable, yet intensely present.