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How Painter Sam McKinniss Captured Troye Sivan For Our Latest Artist Cover

McKinniss, known for capturing watershed moments in popular culture and reflecting them back at us in paint, met the Cult of Personality issue cover star twice for this issue—first on Zoom for an interview and then again on his canvas.

By Ella Martin-Gachot

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Sam McKinniss, *Troye Sivan (for CULTURED)*, 2026. Coordination courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery.

Like many of us, Sam McKinniss first encountered Troye Sivan on Instagram. The Australian wunderkind, then 20, had just released his first studio album, *Blue Neighbourhood*; Chloe Wise, a friend and fellow painter, posted from a Sivan concert, catching McKinniss's attention.

In 2018, the artist spotted Sivan again in Joel Edgerton's conversion-therapy drama, *Boy Erased*. "That was a difficult yet moving and necessary story to tell," McKinniss recalls, "and I was impressed that someone in pop music would want to be part of it." The painter is an architect of celebrity in his own right, having minted Lorde's most memorable album cover (for *Melodrama*) and filled galleries and museums across the U.S. and Europe with his brand of pop-cultural pastiche.

For the issue, he interviewed Sivan (not quite in the flesh, on Zoom)—"I was struck by his sincerity," says McKinniss—then, he got busy painting *CULTURED*'s limited-edition artist cover in his Connecticut barn.