

**NEW HYPERREALIST PAINTINGS BY MARC DENNIS AT GAVLAK PALM BEACH  
EXHIBIT THE DIGITAL VOYEURISM ENDEMIC TO ISOLATION**

Correggio's art. And Venus's groin. You can really possess—even if only for a little while. [...] Sight is a promiscuous sense. The avid gaze always wants more.<sup>1</sup>

– Susan Sontag, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance*

**GAVLAK** is pleased to announce *Love in the Time of Corona*, the gallery's first solo presentation of work by Brooklyn-based painter, **Marc Dennis**. The exhibition features a selection of new paintings in Dennis' signature hyperrealist style, all produced during the prolonged period of social isolation experienced by people around the world, uncannily reflecting a near-universal state of existence in which work, leisure, and communications have been collapsed into a vast, seamless universe of images. By co-opting imagery from celebrated paintings of centuries past, including works by Caravaggio and Ingres, Dennis' works find new meaning in the hallowed lineage of Old Master painting to explore contemporary questions of artistic ownership, pictorial representation, and the consumption of images. *Love in the Time of Corona* opens on April 22 and will be on view through June 5, 2021 at GAVLAK Palm Beach.

An artist's ability to master trompe l'oeil has dominated romanticized histories of art in the West since antiquity. In the mythologizing of Pliny the Elder, the painter Zeuxis was capable of painting grapes that beguiled birds to peck at the surface; yet Zeuxis himself was chastened in trying to draw back an illusionary curtain painted by his rival Parrhasius. Dennis' painting *Memento Mori* similarly tests viewers' powers to discern representation from reality in presenting what initially appears to be a digital, documentary image of a freshly completed still life hanging on a studio wall. Yet the scumbled trails of dry brush marks and bits of blue painter's tape flecking the white wall are as illusory as the dewy blossoms drooping over the lip of the vase. A reference "photo" taped to the left of the painting identifies its origins in the work of the Dutch master Rachel Ruysch, who expertly evoked sensuous surfaces in otherwise somber works. A silhouette of the character who first introduced the artist to the concept of trompe l'oeil—Wile E. Coyote—blazes black against a sheet of white paper, recalling the character's tendency to collide headfirst with the illusionism of painting. Bringing together historical iconography and cartoon imagery, Dennis mediates disparate modes of representation to reveal unexpected commonalities across eras and media, alluding to the imbricated surfaces of iPads where time and space collapse.

In the profound isolation of quarantine, Dennis devised a way of getting close to Old Master works that he could not behold in person through reproduction. While mimicry became for the artist a means of personally experiencing the sweetness and pleasure of the original paintings, the proliferation of imagistic reproductions and excerpts in Dennis' canvases ultimately underscores our distance from both the paintings depicted and their subjects. *From a Close Distance* replicates both the otherworldly pearlescence of the women painted by J.A.D. Ingres and the emotional reserve of one of his final sitters. In the lively environs of the studio, this long-dead model provides beautiful, but cold company.

In *Love in the Time of Corona*, Dennis employs reproduction as a means of tracing the shape of sentiments purveyed by friends and family who are close to the artist personally but held at bay by the partitioning of the pandemic. Upon the tesserae of multi-colored sticky notes in the oil on linen work *Love in the Time of Corona*, Dennis transcribes painstakingly by hand every text message sent to him over this long period of isolation, giving visual weight to the ephemeral labor of care. Our existence is increasingly experienced as a surging stream of images, and the difference between our work, recreation, and love lives has become defined by the shifting of windows on the surface of a digital device. It is this dissolution of discernment—and our active participation in these voyeuristic tendencies—that Dennis' work reveals in unsparingly sharp focus.

## **ABOUT MARC DENNIS**

Marc Dennis (b. 1972, Danvers, Massachusetts) lives and works in Brooklyn. His work was the focus of recent solo presentations for Nancy Littlejohn Fine Art, Houston (2021; 2020); Cris Worley Fine Arts, Dallas; and SOCO Gallery, Charlotte, North Carolina (2018). In February of 2020 his work was featured prominently as part of The Billboard Creative, a project spotlighting the works of contemporary artists on billboards in Los Angeles. Selected private collections featuring his work include JPMorgan Chase, New York; UBS Switzerland AG, Zurich; Amy and John Phelan, Palm Beach; Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, New York; Beth Dewoody, Palm Beach; and Larry Gagosian, Los Angeles. Dennis holds an M.F.A. from the University of Texas, Austin, and a B.F.A. from the Tyler School of Art and Architecture at Temple University, Philadelphia.

1. Susan Sontag, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 71.