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For Immediate Release

Marc Dennis

Once upon a Time

December 15 - January 28, 2023



Marc Dennis, *Sanctuary*, 2022, Oil on linen, 34 x 41 inches (86.4 x 104.1 cm)

GAVLAK is pleased to present *Once Upon A Time*, a solo exhibition of new ten paintings by New York-based artist Marc Dennis. The exhibition marks the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery and his first in Los Angeles. *Once Upon A Time* will be on view December 15 through January 28, 2023, and an open house will take place with the artist on Thursday, December 15th from 10am-6pm.

From time immemorial, the arts have been the source of challenges to our perception. Artists employed a trompe-l'oeil effect, like photo-realism, to examine the interstice between the object as image and the image as object. In this new body of work Marc Dennis looks to explore who and what is left to trompe?

Marc Dennis keeps alive the tradition of illusion in Western art, moving beyond the picture as a site of realness (or, perhaps, truthiness) and into a realm of philosophical inquiry. Dennis takes as a discursive challenge Frank Stella's dictum, "What you see is what you see," turning the abstract painter's declamatory insistence on facture and phenomenon on its head: "What you see" is whatever is in the picture, even as the picture admits to lying. Just because what we see isn't actually there doesn't mean we don't see it. Dennis's extravagant bouquets, painted with a craftsman's exactitude and an Old Master's sense of drama, are not there as bouquets; they are there as renditions.

Depicted in various calamitous conditions is the canvas itself. These paintings of paintings of flowers use flowers as a device, an excuse, to delve into the border region(s) between subject and support and to confound our expectations thereby. This picture making/picturing is not a contradiction so much as a subversion: What we see can't be all we see, and at the same time can't be unseen. These are paintings not only of flowers but of canvases with flowers painted on them - and holes slashed in them, and cartoon animals affixed to or painted on them, adding yet another layer (or two) of forged reality bearing aesthetic and social data.

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Dennis puts these factors into play in optically coherent fashion, making sure that each context does not simply disrupt the others but attenuates them, allows them to work in tandem as much as in mutual disruption. Dennis treats these layers of reality like musical choruses, “harmonizing” layers of perception and meaning so that each line is distinct even while blending with the others. The fictional vandalism Dennis visits on his fictional pictures ultimately makes formal and discursive sense with those pictures: A “canvas” may be shredded, but in just the right places; a Disney critter – or critter sticker – may be plopped onto a bloom, but the colors work together.

To be sure, one on level Dennis is indeed funning around, pulling rabbits (well, birds and chipmunks) out of hats, but his is not a hothouse dialogue. Not only can non-art historians enjoy his work, political scientists, and environments, among others, feel addressed. When we behold these apparently gored canvases, we think of the climate activists’ attacks on museum pieces. With his damage running straight through the flowers and all. Dennis muses here on nature’s collapse at humans’ hands, and how the most delicate and aesthetically gratifying aspects of nature are the first to be damaged. First the butterflies disappear, then the flowers they pollinate...

For all this messaging and messaging upon messaging, Dennis avers that he is motivated as much by sheer beauty as by anything else. He is a sucker for the glorious. He paints flowers because he loves looking at flowers and at paintings of flowers. His numerous references to the affectations of still life painting, celebrate a visual tradition rife with symbolism still appropriate to our era, as it happens. The classic memento mori of the skull, reminding us that life is fleeting, but now also that our entire species seems as doomed as each of us is. But what a gorgeous, luminous skull. Even as he points to the exit sign, Marc Dennis muses on the marvelous.

This writing is an adaptation of *MARC DENNIS: IN REAL LIFE, OUT THE OTHER* an essay accompanying the exhibition authored by Los Angeles-based critic Peter Frank.

Marc Dennis (b. 1972, Danvers, Massachusetts) lives and works in Brooklyn. His work was the focus of recent solo presentations for GAVLAK, Palm Beach (2021); 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. His work recently entered the permanent collection of the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach. 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.