

Kris Knight: *Green Carnation*

January 29 – February 28, 2026

GAVLAK, West Palm Beach

As part of the gallery's *Spotlight* series, GAVLAK presents *Green Carnation*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Canadian artist **Kris Knight**. Comprising a suite of intimate diptychs, the exhibition extends Knight's long-standing engagement with queer identity, portraiture, and coded forms of communication—where intimacy, memory, and symbolism converge.

Inspired by *floriography*, the Victorian-era “language of flowers” in which specific meanings were attributed to plants, *Green Carnation* pairs portraits of men with floral still lifes selected to reflect each sitter through cryptological association. Historically used to convey sentiments that could not be spoken aloud, floriography offered a discreet system of communication—one that resonates deeply with queer histories shaped by secrecy, survival, and coded recognition.

The exhibition takes its title from an event in 1892, when Oscar Wilde instructed his gay male friends to wear green carnations on their lapels to the opening of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. The dyed flower—an emblem of artifice and “unnaturalness”—became a subtle signal of same-sex desire, circulating as a quiet yet defiant queer code. Knight draws upon this lineage of coded language, situating his work within a broader history of LGBTQ+ signaling—from floral metaphors to the visual lexicons of dress, gesture, and style that have long enabled queer community to find itself.

With this new body of work, Knight expands his portraiture practice while continuing to explore the porous boundary between documentation and autobiography. He paints the men around him—predominantly queer creatives—as both subjects and surrogates, staging them within carefully composed, light-filled worlds. Though rooted in real relationships, the portraits resist straightforward likeness. Instead, Knight describes his sitters as “actors” and “vehicles,” through which fragments of his own history, memory, and desire are quietly revealed.

Knight is a self-described “slow painter,” working from photographs, sketches, and extended conversations rather than direct sittings. Time spent with his subjects—talking, listening, remembering—lingers in the paintings after they leave the studio. Across the diptychs, biographical details surface in whispers: memories of childhood gardens, moments of haunting and loss, the early death of a first boyfriend. These works function

as acts of recollection—records of lived experience that move fluidly between personal confession and collective queer memory.

The floral still lifes in *Green Carnation* serve as critical extensions of Knight's portraits, offering metaphorical insight through the symbolic language of plants. Flowers and botanicals, recurring motifs in Knight's practice, mirror the fleeting beauty and emotional vulnerability that define his figurative work. His signature chalky pastel palette is expanded here to include more unnatural hues and tones, referencing Wilde's dyed carnations and reinforcing the exhibition's themes of artifice, desire, and coded expression.

About *Spotlight*

Spotlight is GAVLAK's series of focused solo presentations, each designed to illuminate pivotal moments or themes within an artist's practice. Running alongside the gallery's regular programming, the series provides a platform for concentrated inquiry and experimental formats, including in situ projects and public installations. By foregrounding specific facets of an artist's work, *Spotlight* expands traditional exhibition models and reimagines how art is experienced and contextualized.