

Matt Connors

Cooperative Village

Preview: 6 February 2026

Lend Some Assistance to the Object¹

To what extent does an abstract image have allegiance to its origin? In the case of Matt Connors, his paintings draw on many sources, which, for him, can ultimately vanish in the wing mirror as he careers away from them.

It is not necessary to know what came before an image to appreciate it. But, if you are curious, it might be a detail captured on his phone, something he has seen on the street, a fragment from design history or from an unrelated book. Connors's approach isn't about clarifying – or even paying homage to – these things, but rather complicating them and rendering them beyond the direct purview of language, doing the opposite of wrapping them up neatly into a parcel.

Doubt and trouble are both present in these paintings, which, at first, might appear as pure abstractions. But Connors's preoccupation is with the transformations and tessellations that lead from point A to B. He is interested in what he describes as 'translation', or the difficulties that emerge in the gap between a source and the thing it is being metabolised to make. Connors's approach is akin to that of a writer who writes to figure things out, to understand how they feel about a situation or object. He doesn't see the end at the beginning; instead, his paintings are accumulative. In this sense, I view them as interconnected, with one informing the other.

The influence of Man Ray might flutter around the works on display in Bologna, but Connors never directly pins him to them. Instead, the dadaist is an ambient presence; 'alive' and 'direct' is how he describes Ray's paintings, and this sense of frank dynamism strikes me as a fundamental quality in the measure of his own work. Ray would often produce paintings by impressing a painted surface onto another; this is a method Connors employs in works such as *Impressed Wet Heater* (2025). The painting features a central vertical grey rectangle on a mustard ground, the colour of which occasionally flickers like an internal light coming through the crack of a door left ajar, framed by chains of dark blue paint and areas of pink, green, violet and peach.

There is a studied irreverence in much of Connors's work, but in this painting the opaque central form anchors the canvas in something less flighty. Similarly, in *Font* (2026), the vertical sticks of colour – orange and rust – appear to be subsumed by a sequence of overlaid dark blue frames, as though the thrust of the painting were to describe its own objecthood, in the manner of Frank Stella's *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959). Connors's work, however, is neither as regimented nor as directed as Stella's; he is willing to fold the structure into the image or to change course midway through.

There is a sense that the painting makes itself once the approach is established, whether that be forming around an impression of an object or departing from an image of an object. Speed is also a consideration – or, more precisely, the immediacy and impact that swift application creates is an energy Connors wants to convey: for instance, he might outline a prospective shape with oil paint directly from the tube onto a canvas, as we see here in the raised areas. Connors's works appear to possess their own unresolved logic, informed by images and the history of painting: entities can be free-floating, and daubs and jabs of paint can obscure underlying layers. The figuring-things-out approach strikes me as an honest one; Connors's pictures aren't designed to suggest that painting is a lofty or duplicitous language. In fact, they seem to evade a consistent lexicon.

In school, the artist was exposed to an approach to making music that borrowed from improvisational techniques, something that continues to inform his painting. He understood improvised/free music to be both instinctual and structured. We might see the impressions of objects and the root of paintings in objects as providing a structure around which the improvisational responses can occur. How to create a gesture with abandon and freedom – the quality Connors admires in Ray's paintings – while also in dialogue with the history of painting?

I see this most vividly in *Soft Eye* (2025), in which energetic, bendy fragments of yellow, orange and blue spiral outwards from a central position, only to hit a frame that contains them: an expression thwarted? I sense Connors needs such a structure in which to play. If one painting leads to another, Connors's process is self-generating, which raises the question of an exhibition – not as a unified proposition advancing a single point or argument, but as something that offers a glimpse of where the artist is currently at. In writing terms, the show isn't a full stop so much as a colon, something we're going through. It enables him a way to reflect on the maelstrom of material that makes up these complex works.

In Bologna, it feels remiss not to mention Giorgio Morandi – the consummate painter of introspective household objects. Several of Connors's works derive from a book from the 1970s on the design of ovens. He's enthralled that such a book existed, a time when everyday design was perhaps more revered. Connors's work isn't observational in the way Morandi's was; no, he isn't looking at the oven and then back at the canvas to transcribe its image. But he is thinking about looking and our relationship to objects – the painting as an object in itself. He is working out how to capture a comparable material honesty once the point of departure lies back in the distance.

– Text by Sean Burns

1 Brian Eno, "Baby's on Fire," *Here Come the Warm Jets*, Virgin Records, 1974.