



Nikki Maloof, *Lost in a Bramble*, 2026. Oil on linen. 61 x 79 x 2 inches. Photo: Charles Benton. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

NIKKI MALOOF

MENAGERIE

September 9 - October 17, 2026

Perrotin New York is pleased to present *Menagerie*, an exhibition by Nikki Maloof. The artist's new body of paintings presents a world where imagined interiors and fantastical landscapes become proxies for the human experience and our repressed animal instincts. Over the last few years Maloof has expanded her intimate painterly universe to include vast country landscapes. In this new body of work, she moves into public spaces, including a zoo and a restaurant.

Every day, Maloof drops her daughters off at school before heading to her backyard studio in Massachusetts. There she follows the crumbs of her own desires. She plays around with paint until a metallic pattern emerges, reminding her of a grid. In the grid, she sees confinement, which takes her mind to a zoo, the sort of place she takes her children. Eventually, the painting becomes *Menagerie*, the exhibition's titular work. To Maloof, the zoo embodies dichotomies of sadness and joy, freedom and containment; it also serves as a metaphor for motherhood. In the background of her painting stands an elaborate cage; to the left, a leopard with a pigeon in its mouth; to the right, a giraffe whose impassive eye

reaches just over the top of the cage. The foreground is messier: two picnic tables, crumpled napkins, smears of ketchup, and pigeons everywhere, fighting over garbage and waiting for something to happen in their space of unfettered freedom.

In Maloof's paintings, human figures are partially obscured, never quite revealing themselves, but animals are fully visible with intact identities. "I'm trying to make sense of what it means to be human," Maloof says. "Aren't we just animals? Are we even that special?"

The sense of confinement is heightened in *Lost in a Bramble*. Characteristic of Maloof's paintings, the human figures are fragmented, almost disembodied. Two girls in white are enmeshed in a bramble of blackberries that completely obscure their faces. Their hands emerge from puffs of green, reaching for the fruits rendered in lush, rounded strokes and tones of wine, fuchsia, and a purple so dark it is almost black. The thorns, if you look closely, are everywhere. And a fence, echoing the one in *Menagerie*, is just visible over the horizon.



Nikki Maloof, *Abandoned Picnic*, 2026. Oil on linen. 49 x 66 x 2 inches. Photo: Charles Benton. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Maloof's subjects often convey a sense of loneliness buoyed by humor and painted in a saturated palette. For Maloof, the home, and motherhood, is both dark and light, both soft berry and hard cage. It is entrapment, and, also, the wash of unbelievable joy. *Midnight Bouquet* masquerades as a still life with flowers – two chairs, a cat, all set against a wash of speckled, shockingly aroused magenta. The color palette exudes brightness in the flowers and somberness in the red tablecloth, while the empty seats suggest an absence of human connection.

In *The Restaurant*, layers of activity create a sense of distance or containment. Depicting a banquet, the painting is filled with mothers, or women who could be mothers, with classic Maloof tropes: fish rendered in exquisite detail, vegetables that look like sea creatures, intricate patterns, Frankenstein hands, crinkled table linens. The composition is an orgy of gluttony: stuffed olives sink into clear martinis, deviled eggs are coated in caviar, a fish picked to its skeleton. The diners, shown only from the neck down, are obviously gossiping. At the table to the left, young women hold small dogs, purebred and vicious, training wheels for the future. To the right, a table of older women dons the armor of labels and babies. One with natural grey hair breastfeeds, while another, in Chanel ballet flats, offers a pacifier to a baby whose eyes peek over the edge of the table with the same unfocussed impassivity as the giraffe in *Menagerie*.

The most thinking Maloof does is when she's planning the logic of her paintings. Throughout the exhibition, recurring patterns and color palettes connect disparate settings: plaid reappears in picnic blankets, animal enclosures, fences, and furniture. In *Abandoned Picnic*, for example: where do the flowers go? The plates? The melon? What colors, and in what saturation? What brushes, which techniques? Pigeons appear again, just in different form. "It's like I'm a musician, and I'm practicing the song a lot," she says of her process, creating study after study before projecting the image onto the canvas and perfecting the composition.

In the moment of creation, she disappears. "The best feeling is when you have it all laid out, and you're ready to go to town, and you can sit down and be gone from reality," Maloof says. The magic of placing your mind outside the body in the form of art is, perhaps, what makes us distinctly human after all.

—Brienne Walsh