


ELEVATED

SPRING 2021

Art



MARC DENNIS
MODERN MASTER



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WINTER



Allegory of Admiration, 2021
Oil on Linen, 60" x 64"

Marc Dennis is an American artist known for his hyper-realistic paintings that celebrate beauty as a kind of tension between the classical and the contemporary. Interested in transformative possibilities Dennis merges various movements throughout the western art historical canon, with modern tropes exploring the charged subjects of perception and pleasure in order to create fresh paintings rich with hype and meta-narratives.

Sarah Gavlak, owner of Gavlak Gallery sat down with artist Marc Dennis recently to ask him a few questions.

Sarah Gavlak: What is your earliest memory of art? And when did you know you wanted to be an artist?

Marc Dennis: "I remember drawing all the time as a kid, but it was just second nature to me and I never considered it "art." At age 7 however, my second-grade teacher in lieu of President's Day, asked the students to write a short story, or create a drawing or collage. I chose to make an 18 x 24-inch drawing using colored pencils on paper of Abraham Lincoln. When I brought it into class the next day the teacher called it an "amazing work of art." She taped it to the wall in the main hallway for everyone in the school to see. It was the first time I truly felt appreciated by a large audience and it was then that I realized what "art" was or could be. I enjoyed having an audience! I still have the drawing!"



Caravaggio's Cat, 2021
Oil on Linen, 32" x 34"

Truth be told I never really made a conscious decision to become an artist. Being an artist chose me rather than my choosing it. I had always drawn and painted since I was a very young kid and I guess it just gained momentum over the years, and in my senior year in high school when I still really didn't know what I wanted to do, the school guidance counselor and a juvenile court judge basically said to me that I would either become one of three things; a cop, a criminal or an artist. And...well, here I am."

One of the reasons you and I have such a great time talking about art is because we are both art history nerds. Who are your biggest influences or artists you admire?

"Hah! I'll always accept the "nerd" label when it comes to art history – and sports. In terms of art history, well, there are several old masters whose work continues to have an impact on me. First and foremost is Velasquez's "Las Meninas" because of its ability to play with one's perception. It's truly a masterpiece on all levels.



"Where the Sun Hits the Water," 2021
Oil on Linen, 60" x 57"



*From a Close Distance, 2021
Oil on Linen, 56" x 60"*

Titan, Caravaggio and Rubens amongst others, created paintings that are dynamically composed, emotionally charged, and technically quite wonderful. One of my favorite paintings is Giovanni Bellini's "Saint Francis in Ecstasy" at the Frick Collection in New York City. Its surface and cool colors remind me of ice skating across a smooth pond in the winter. It is a true gem. I also love all those Dutch floral masters! Richter is pretty darn good too. I'm pretty much interested in just about everything and inspired by just about anything."

Tell me a bit about your most recent paintings that were all made during Covid, in particular the idea behind the animals in front of your paintings and the very "meta" imagery of the paintings in situ while being made.

"I've always included animals in my art and when I read about the joint project between The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Kansas City Zoo in March, 2020 it gave me a fresher perspective on the idea of the intersection of animals, beauty, perception, and the meta-narrative in painting. It was pretty loaded stuff. Both institutions were closed to the public because of the pandemic, but they organized a visit of Humboldt Penguins to the museum for a "morning of fine art and culture." I thought it was an awesome and fun idea and meaningful to me personally because I've always seen beauty as an experience or series of experiences.

The pandemic created the interaction of disparate and unexpected elements somewhat playing on our perception of what is real and what is not. By virtue, it appealed to shared public and personal responses to a range of experiences and emotions. We all seemed to be feeling a bit like Wile E. Coyote where he paints a tunnel on a rock wall, and the Road Runner then all of a sudden out of nowhere races through the painted fake tunnel. And the coyote foolishly yet earnestly follows trying to run through the tunnel after the road runner, only to smash into the hard rock-face.

As an artist I felt the urge to create contemporary mythologies about this chapter in our history. With that, my intentions were to paint emotionally charged, thought provoking and curious images that conveyed stories about stories, encompassing other "little stories" within totalizing schemes that play not just on our perceptions but also our consequent search for meaning. And naturally I threw in a bit of humor, much like the Wile E Coyote bit because it's what I felt was needed during such heavy and isolating albeit hopeful and courageous times."

I know a lot of artists spent time in quarantine thinking about how art can bring about healing and hope. I think people will find your new paintings in our exhibition both uplifting and beautiful!

Marc Dennis, *Love in the Time of Corona, Recent Paintings* at Gavlak Gallery, Palm Beach, FL, April 24 - June 5, 2021



Memento Mori, 2021
Oil on Linen, 58" x 60"