

Studio Check: Marc Dennis

By Scott Indrisek



Photography by Kristine Larsen

“MY ART IS ALL ABOUT ARTIFICE, staging, and drama,” says Dennis, a hyperrealist painter whose studio is in the Dumbo neighborhood of Brooklyn. His canvases are technically polished yet conceptually playful. Previous works have depicted an uncommon array of subjects: kittens sprawled out next to guns; hunks of raw meat hanging from hooks. His most recent body of work, on view through January 4 at Hasted Kraeutler gallery in New York, is rife with visual jokes and allusions from art history. Many of these latest paintings feature young, mostly blonde women caught in the act of observing art. Dennis considers them “surrogates,” and delights in what he considers the voyeuristic layering within each work. He’s mixed famous paintings within paintings, such as Caravaggio’s *Sick Bacchus*, with canvases in which the blonde spectators eye recastings of his own works.

And in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, 2013, Dennis has imagined a wholly fictional sculpture—a pile of roses arrayed in a pyramid, à la Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s candy stacks—and painted it, tempting viewers to mistake it for an existing work from the art historical canon. Dennis’s diverse inspirations are apparent from the artifacts and quotes dotting his studio walls: a photograph of Sitting Bull (Dennis lived on a South Dakotan Indian reservation for three months); a postcard of Diego Velázquez’s 1656 *Las Meninas*, which he considers one of the greatest paintings of all time; and a quote from Edgar Allan Poe on the way in which “absurd combinations produce humor.”