

Artist Brings Pandemic Themed Exhibit to Gavlak Gallery



Marc Dennis's *From a Close Distance*, oil on linen, is at Gavlak Palm Beach through June 5, 2021.

If you go by the Gavlak Gallery at the Royal Poinciana Plaza, there is a painting that you should look at very closely.

The work, on view through June 5, is titled "Love in the Time of Corona" by Brooklyn-based artist Marc Dennis. It shows dozens of messages on colorful Post-it like notes, each one haphazardly placed on a paint-splattered canvas.

Only up close can viewers see that the notes and the canvas are a clever illusion. They're paintings within a painting.



Marc Dennis's *Love in the Time of Corona* is at Gavlak Palm Beach through June 5, 2021.

The notes are real messages Dennis received on social media throughout the COVID-19 pandemic from people commenting about his work. Wanting to portray them as real as possible prompted him to leave even the spelling errors, Dennis said.



Love in the Time of Corona by Marc Dennis shows hyper-realistic notes on canvas. The painting and the exhibit of the same name are on view through June 5 at the Gavlak Gallery. (Adriana Delgado)

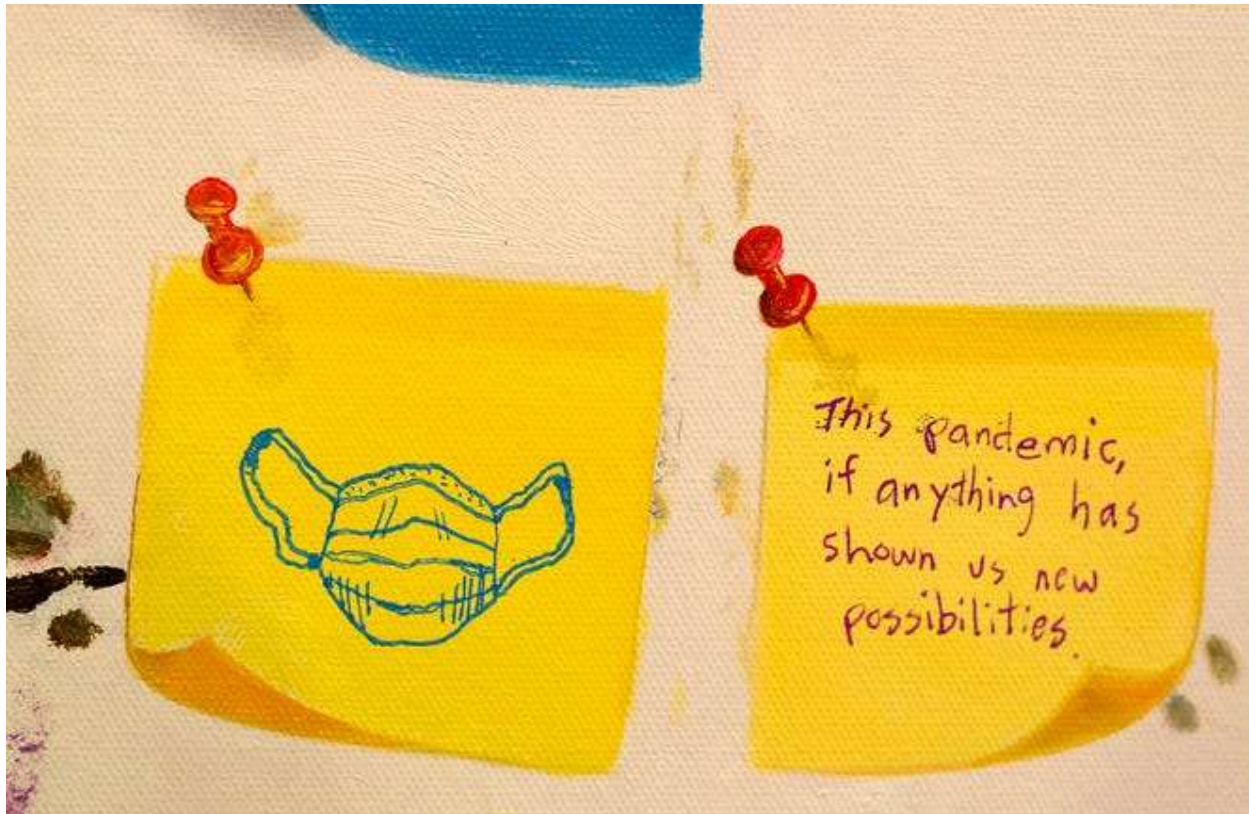
“All these (messages) deal with what everyone was dealing with in lockdown. We texted and messaged more during this pandemic than at any other time,” Dennis said.

He aptly named the painting “Love in the Time of Corona” as an homage for everyone who could not be together with friends and loved ones during lockdown.

Dennis didn’t fully know it at the time, he said, but he was creating a body of work with the purpose of reminding people what life was like during the pandemic, and the things society was desperately missing.

That body of work would become the "Love in the Time of Corona" exhibit.

Dennis is known for his hyperrealist style and adding contemporary interpretations to the works of Old Masters like Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and the neo-classical French artist Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres.



Marc Dennis's *Love in the Time of Corona*, oil on linen, detail, is at Gavlak Palm Beach through June 5, 2021.

Although Dennis began one of the works, "Allegory of Admiration," before the pandemic, its progression was ultimately influenced by it. What started out with an image of blooming flowers, turned into an exploration of life and death.

"I wasn't prepared for this painting to take on such a dramatic change. I was working on only the bouquet and the pandemic hits. Suddenly, I'm truly painting potential disaster," he said.

Viewers will notice the painting seems to be part of another painting, what Dennis describes as the "illusion of the trompe l'oeil, seducing the mind and tricking the eye." At the bottom of the canvas, a group of penguins stare at the bouquet of flowers, seemingly ensorcelled by it.

The addition of the penguins was inspired by a story published last May about the Kansas City Zoo in Missouri allowing a group of Peruvian penguins to roam around the Nelson-Watkins Museum, which was closed because of COVID-19.



Allegory of Admiration, oil on linen, detail, is included in Marc Dennis: *Love in the Time of Corona* at Gavlak Palm Beach through June 5, 2021.

I chose to do a Photoshop mockup with the penguins and this painting as a humorous post for my Instagram followers. People just freaked out ... really believing I had penguins in the studio," Dennis said.

This was a clear message, Dennis said, that people needed to be uplifted, "journey to different spaces that didn't exist before" while also finding more positive alternate realities to better cope with the true reality of the pandemic.

Also in the exhibit are “Memento Mori,” featuring flowers in the style of Dutch master Rachel Ruysch; “From A Close Distance,” which pays tribute to Ingres’ work of Pauline, Princess of Broglie; and “When the Sun Hits the Water,” featuring a dog with a red Frisbee running across what seems to be an unfinished painting of Ingres’ “Portrait of Baronne de Rothschild.”

Dennis said he wanted to show the paintings as works in progress rather than the finished pieces, sharing how his process worked, which is why they feature elements present in his studio — an image of Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers,” an illustration from the Walt Disney movie “Snow White,” and a running silhouette of Wile E. Coyote.

The artist said his love for his children is the only thing greater than his love for art.

“Art saved me. I rediscovered my love with painting during the pandemic and it was a really beautiful experience,” Dennis said.

A Boston native, Dennis is one of five siblings who grew up in Puerto Rico, New York and New Jersey. After being told by teachers he had a talent for art, he went to Tyler School of Art of Temple University in Philadelphia for a bachelor's in fine arts.

Dennis got a master’s in fine arts from The University of Texas at Austin, and was the first studio art major there to receive a Presidential Full Tuition Scholarship.

He met Gavlak Gallery owner Sarah Gavlak about seven years ago through art fairs and just by moving in the same circles, Dennis said.

“One of my collectors suggested to Sarah (Gavlak) she should take a closer look at my work. She visited my studio in New York before the lockdown in March and was blown away by what she saw,”





Where the Sun Hits the Water, oil on linen, detail, is included in Marc Dennis: *Love in the Time of Corona* at Gavlak Palm Beach through June 5, 2021.

Gavlak offered Dennis the opportunity to work together on a show, his first in Palm Beach. At the time, he didn't have enough work to fill the space but inspiration for what became "Love in the Time of Corona" surged progressively.

All of the paintings in the exhibit are now sold or on reserve. Dennis said what he enjoys the most about being an artist, is the ability to make art about his own ideas and interpretations of the world.

"Imagination is much more important than anything else. It will lift us, take us where we need to go and help us make sense of the world," he said.

— Adriana Delgado