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Dennis Kardon: *Transgressions*
September 14–October 26, 2024

Dennis Kardon is one of the most accomplished and transgressive representational painters working today. Kardon's genre defying paintings exist in various stages of formation and disarticulation, always uncanny and vertiginous, like life itself. As I survey the dearth of writing on his work over a long simmering career, a superficial but funny Ken Johnson quote "generously painterly, voluptuously creepy" is the common sound bite repeated ad infinitum, desperately in need of elaboration.

Kardon's paintings have the most in common with John Currin in his ability to invent pictorial space and invoke the gravitas of the "old masters"—seemingly without the aid of photography or live models. Unlike Currin; Kardon gives his imagination and painterly arsenal carte blanche to stray as far as he pleases from high mannerist or realist rules and regulations—encompassing many developments in late 19th through 20th century modernism while remaining stubbornly difficult to categorize in any traditional genre of representational painting.

Unlike almost all contemporary figurative painters working today, Kardon never renders or draws anything—the images are economically and spontaneously formed entirely through brushstrokes and the innumerable ways of applying and removing paint with a palette knife. Verisimilitude always ruptures on close examination; areas of realism collapse into abstraction and abstract artifacts from previous stages are assigned properties of light and shadow—grounding themselves "in the real". All possibilities of narrative or a linear concept of meaning are quickly derailed by arbitrary intrusions in the service of heightening the formal, psychological or emotional impact of each work.

While Kardon claims his painterly interests are extremely narrow, "Manet, Picabia and Guston," of course, this isn't entirely true. On its face, Dennis is one of the most articulate painter writers in New York and much like David Salle, one can learn a lot more about his astute conception of painting in his reviews of other artists. His writings on Roe Ethridge, Cindy Sherman, Carroll Dunham, Charline Von Heyl, Francis Picabia, Al Held, Eric Fischl and Jasper Johns are particularly relevant to Kardon's expressive and psychological relationship to the concept of realism and the invented image.

In a review of Kardon's solo exhibition at Mitchell Alpus in 2004, Raphael Rubinstein states in *Art in America*, "amid the recent resurgence of interest in figurative painting, most of the attention has gone to artists that have emerged in the last decade or so: Lisa Yuskavage, John Currin, Elizabeth Peyton...One of the best of these is Dennis Kardon...How refreshing it is to find a virtuoso painter who eschews stylistic pastiche, embraces emotion, and is seemingly unafraid of his own inventive powers both pictorial and psychological."

Eighteen years later, in another wave of representational painting this time held hostage by appeals to progressive sentiment at the expense of painterly experimentation, I find myself asking the same question— Who else but Kardon, with his singular ability to conjure images from paint itself is still elevating and subverting the tradition of representational painting, conveying the complexity and uncertainty of human emotion with humor and pathos?

—Kevin Tobin, September 2024.

Dennis Kardon was born in Des Moines, Iowa, attended Yale College, and came to New York City on the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He has had one-person exhibitions at The Garrison Art Center, Barbara Toll Fine Arts, Richard Anderson Fine Arts, the Mitchell Alpus Gallery, and in 2021, at Massimo De Carlo Gallery in London. He is the recipient of a NYFA grant, Lewis Comfort Tiffany grant,

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and John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship. His work has been reviewed several times in Art in America, as well as the New York Times, and the Village Voice, among many other publications. He is well known for his piece, 49 Jewish Noses, 1992-1995, which was exhibited at the Jewish Museum in New York, The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, as well as a number of museums in Europe. Although primarily a painter, Kardon has used various printmaking techniques throughout his career, including woodcut, lithography, and digital media. His writing has appeared in Artnet, Art in America, Hyperallergic, Artcritical, and The Brooklyn Rail, and most recently, Artforum. His studio is in Brooklyn.

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