

I'm obsessed with comedy. I listen pretty much non-stop while I'm painting – improv, stand-up, interviews with funny people, whatever I can get. In my head, paintings and jokes come from the same place. My studio is littered with premises like “lawn mower far away,” “wiggling pink paper” or “mailman in love.” The recent watercolors are an attempt to share the mysterious promise of that initial stage. Ideas that are developed into oil paintings go through a process not unlike the one described by Jerry Seinfeld, just different tricks for a different audience. Is it funny? Does it work? That's all that matters.

The best subjects are usually familiar...here's a favorite John Currin quote: “I think what I do is find a cliché and try to believe in it, try to get to where I don't laugh at it.” Paintings talk slowly, so humor inevitably gets warped and transformed, often exposing underlying feelings. My sensibility tends toward the surreal, during studio visits people usually mention Magritte. I love Magritte, but I think my weirdness stems more from American culture and watching a million hours of tv. Growing up in the famously down-to-earth and repressed Midwest, I learned to express myself through slight deviations from normalcy. That inclination and my belief in painting's continued viability are at the root of my fluid approach to style. So many different kinds of painting can work, and it's most exciting when you make something that's not immediately recognizable as your own. -MC, March 2014

Mathew Cerletty was born in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin in 1980. He has been included in group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY; Royal Academy of Arts, London; State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia and Museum Voor Moderne Kunst, Oostende, Belgium.

The video *Jerry Seinfeld: How to Write a Joke* was originally made by Jenny Woodward for The New York Times

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