

James Gardner

Iconophile

March 22 - April 26, 2025

Galerie Nicolas Robert, Toronto, is pleased to present *Iconophile*, a solo exhibition of James Gardner's most recent work, marking his third presentation with the gallery. Continuing his research into Byzantine icon painting traditions, "image agency," and Western esotericism, Gardner reconstructs image archives and historical imagery from iconographic traditions into paintings. To build what often appear to be ancient frescoes, Gardner pushes gesso through burlap (used as a painting stretcher) into carved plywood bas-relief molds, building three-dimensional lines, shapes, and forms on the painting's surface. Using a variety of painting and printmaking techniques to apply and remove images and paint, Gardner creates works that appear curiously historical, with images emerging and receding within fields of color and texture.

These images are the result of research into multiple forms of "image agency" as found throughout history, including alchemy, the veneration of Byzantine painting traditions, and the liturgical and magical practices of religious and occult schools. These are traditions in which images and pictures are understood to hold an acute form of agency. In this way, these image-making traditions are used to better understand the role and function of the image in relation to contemporary modes of making, thinking, and seeing. When interpreting and producing images in this way, the task becomes not only understanding what an image represents, but also how it can be used. The act of painting itself becomes an act of process philosophy to understand how new or ancient images can enact agency. For Gardner, making art is a contemplative exercise in thinking about images and how they work on us, on our bodies, and on our identities.

James Gardner (b. Kitchener, ON, 1983; lives and works in Montreal) holds an MFA from Concordia University (2020) and a BA from the University of Guelph (2008). His solo exhibitions include Fonderie Darling, Montreal (2024); Glenhyrst Gallery, Brantford, ON (2024); and Galerie Nicolas Robert, Montreal/Toronto (2025, 2021). His work has also been featured in group exhibitions at Stewart Hall, Pointe-Claire, QC (2023); KWAG, Kitchener, ON (2022); and FOFA Gallery, Montreal (2021), among others.

1. ***Fendulus' Pointer Pointing***, 2024

Oil, acrylic on burlap with gesso
137.2 x 114.3 cm (54 x 45 ")

2. ***Saint James Fishing***, 2025

Oil and acrylic on burlap
182.9 x 165.1 cm (72 x 65 ")

3. ***Monk Head (Modestos)***, 2025

Oil and acrylic on burlap
182.9 x 165.1 cm (72 x 65 ")

4. ***Saint Luke Painting***, 2025

Oil, acrylic on burlap with gesso
72 x 65 cm (28.3 x 25.6 ")

5. ***Giordano Digging***, 2022

Oil, acrylic on burlap with gesso
50.8 x 45.7 cm (20 x 18 ")

6. ***Katagogia (Dionysos and the Pirates) / Acteon Swimming (Contention of Men Redux)***, 2024

Oil, acrylic on burlap with gesso
330.2 x 365.8 cm (130 x 144 ")

7. ***Venerators***, 2025

Oil and acrylic on burlap
137.2 x 114.3 cm (54 x 45 ")