



In Dialogue
Kent O'Connor
Feb 11 – Apr 11, 2026

Working from real life has kept Kent O'Connor prone to the unpredictable yet mesmerized by its freedom. For the artist's first gallery show in Europe, titled *In Dialogue*, O'Connor presents a body of work that investigates the concept of narrative paintings or "what it means to paint narration." In landscape scenes, portraits, still lifes, and drawings that are conceptually connected, what the artist refers to as "narrative qualities" emerge through uncanny nuances. In a fitting coincidence, *In Dialogue* unfolds in Brussels, barely a stone's throw away from the iconic museum dedicated to Magritte, an artist whose own work has had a lasting impact on O'Connor's means of worldmaking.

A highlight from the exhibition, the large-scale *Figures and Objects in a Landscape* (2025) combines elements from the artist's creative lexicon in one captivating scene. Lying on the foreground, we witness a young man sunburned and exhausted, surrounded by a plethora of arbitrary objects. Behind him, a cyclist moves along either departing from or arriving to the scene. Finally, a reflected portrait quietly spies from the corner of the canvas. All of this takes place in what appears to be a scorching hot sandy plateau, surrounded by a lush valley from which various homes emerge. Painted outdoors, or *en plein air*, O'Connor responded to the environment around him while concurrently resisting a singular cohesive direction. The lying figure, painted again from live observation, is a sitter well-known to the artist yet kept unknown to the viewer. The intense colors of the skies, muted by the ochre tones of the earth, are as dystopian as they are realistic, mirroring realities and mythologies of the Californian landscape. Ideas of California have been consistently molded by culture, such as in the iconic 1970s David Hockney paintings to which the artist nods in observance alongside other enduring Hollywood images. Resistant to nostalgia, O'Connor creates his own suspended tableau, free of received romanticism, alive to the scene in front of him.

Whereas, in another outdoor painting, *Jet Propulsion Laboratory Altadena, California* (2025), California appears deprived of figures and home to corporate buildings, parking lots, and industrial structures. Emerging discreetly is the outline of NASA's historic Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a space founded by a man who invested as much effort into science as he did into theories of the occult. Although such elements are not noticeable at first consideration, they belong to an underlying leitmotif of tension that hovers above this and other narratives from the show. Here, the early landscape paintings of Balthus form the backdrop to dreamlike sensibilities that suffuse the artist's unconventional choices.

Another recurring theme in O'Connor's production is revisiting still-life traditions. *Objects From the Landscape on the Table* (2025) is admittedly a mocking exercise of what it describes. Miscellaneous objects such as a basketball, a log, a green apple, a fork, a ruler, or a marble statue are arranged on a table not as symbols of an elegant composition or testimony to style, but as characters. According to the artist, objects become characters as they enter his studio, "transformed and gaining a life in the painting that is elevated and greater than their previous one." It is this amalgamation of different perspectives that creates some kind of individuality in the objects, or compartmentalized authority. Many of these objects reappear in

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other paintings – a deflated volleyball, banal yet technically challenging to depict – as does the sitter, who lingers again in exhaustion behind the table. It is a play of perspective, both literally as in size and proportions as in figuratively, emerging through the painter's own ever-present gaze like a Velázquez character standing in the corner, a representational schematic that O'Connor both inherits and builds from.

Channeling the Spanish master's metalinguistic exercise, O'Connor admits to the pleasure of including himself as a fixture in his paintings. In the works on view, it is both a reflection in the rearview and a photograph gazing back upon its viewers. More evident, *Portrait of an Artist* (2025) is a rendition of the painter himself standing tall and in stylish composure. The signifiers with and around him once again reference the artist's own cultural baggage, such as the striped trousers attributed to the zebras he has so often depicted. Freud, an intellectual touchstone for the artist, is hard to avoid: hate-objects, love-objects, fetish-objects, and through O'Connor's work, perhaps the provocative accommodation of irrelevant ones?

In the world O'Connor creates, a table spreads like a valley, and a valley is observed from the same vantage point as a table. Across *In Dialogue*, objects, arbitrary, banal, and often recurring, sketch a discrete mythology in which legibility and opacity are held in equal measure. Like genre painters since the invention of the form, who composed for viewers fluent in codes as much as they painted and embedded secrets in a specific table spread or a sitter's gaze, O'Connor's macro and micro landscapes carry narrative qualities suspended between cultural legibility and observation.

Kent O'Connor (b. 1987, Virginia, USA) lives and works in Los Angeles.

Recent solo exhibitions include *In Dialogue*, **Mendes Wood DM**, Brussels (2026); *Flame of Vapor*, **Matthew Brown**, New York (2025); *Everything All At Once*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2023); *Close the Door Behind You*, **Matthew Brown**, Los Angeles (2021).

Recent group exhibitions include *PROGRAM*, **Matthew Brown**, New York (2024); *Arcadia and Elsewhere*, **James Cohan**, New York (2024); *Papertrail*, **Matthew Brown**, Los Angeles (2023); *Uncanny Interiors*, **Nicola Vassell**, New York (2022); *Their Private Worlds Contained the Memory of a Painting that had Shapes as Reassuring as the Uncanny Footage of a Sonogram*, **Matthew Brown**, Los Angeles (2022); *The Scenic Route*, **1969 Gallery**, New York (2021); *Open Air*, **Tong Art Advisory**, The Hamptons (2020); *It Seems So Long Ago*, **Matthew Brown**, Los Angeles (2020).

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