

The Morning News

Honey Bunny *Marc Dennis*



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Interview by Nozlee Samadzadeh

There's something subversive about Marc Dennis's richly colored new paintings, and it's not just all the guns and kittens.

Centered around a Jeff Koons pendant of a rabbit, Dennis's "vignettes into modern America" demonstrate how the everyday, sinister, and beautiful coexist, if a bit grimly.

Honey Bunny is on display at Hasted Kraeutler through Dec. 3, 2011.

Dennis's paintings are in numerous private and public collections and have been exhibited throughout the United States and worldwide. Dennis received his BFA from Tyler School of Art and MFA from the University of Texas at Austin in 1993. Born in Danvers, Mass., in 1964, the artist now lives and works in both Brooklyn and Ithaca, NY. He is married with two young children, a daughter and a son. He is represented with Hasted Kraeutler Gallery in New York City.

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TMN: Why the guns?

Marc Dennis: My intention has always been to strive toward painting images that elicit contrasting emotions and the perfect balance of dichotomies. I think about the complexities and contradictions of power and fragility on a daily basis, especially since becoming a father. That's who I am; that's what I'm about. Guns are the perfect iconic American masculine imagery. They exude a physical subversive presence—symbolic of power and fragility but also of beauty and the grotesque, survival and death. They serve as a visual marker for our times.

TMN: What is the significance of the "Honey Bunny" necklace in the paintings?

MD: Jeff Koons created a series of pure platinum bunny pendants. They're very expensive functional art. I was introduced to the necklace by a collector, and after holding it and looking at it for a while, I realized it would make for a solid addition to my work because of its purity and cuteness, but also its decadence and excess. It's another perfect American visual signifier.

As a point of information, my painting is titled "Honey Bunny," whereas the Koons piece I believe is simply titled "Platinum Rabbit Pendant."

TMN: The objects depicted in your paintings evoke a kind of grim Americana: milkshakes, patterned bedspreads, kittens... and guns. Is there a particular time period you had in mind for these paintings?

MD: I always approach making paintings in our current times. I'd like to think of my work as vignettes into modern America.

TMN: What kind of research do you do before painting a gun on a woman's jewelry-strewn dresser, or a puppy resting on a pile of raw meat?

MD: I paint mainly from real-life experiences. Most of my imagery stems from places I've been or objects I've been in contact with on some level. The woman's jewelry-strewn dresser could be my wife's or a friend's. My images are both real and staged. They are mental outbursts and emotional outpourings, autobiographical on one level and fictitious on another.

TMN: Do you consider your work to be part of the photorealist movement?

MD: I'm not a photorealist. I violate the information a photo offers. My understanding of photorealism is that photorealists adhere to the photo, paying close attention to every detail, shadow, light source, etc., whereas I take many liberties when looking at a photo. I also only use photos as references for my paintings and may even include different light sources, etc.

TMN: What are you working on now?

MD: I've always been interested in the contradictions and complexities of universal themes such as desire, beauty, life and death, and continue to do so in an even more decadent series of gems and jewels and skulls and animals. My imagination is extremely restless and my choice of subject matter varies dramatically because of the infinite number of things to be excited about as an artist. So with that said, I'm always open to taking a left turn and letting my mind wander, wonder, and play before I commit to a series, and play before I commit to a series.