



Marc Dennis

TEXT BY SCOTT INDRISEK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

"MY ART IS ALL ABOUT ARTIFICE, staging, and drama," says Dennis, a hyperrealist painter whose studio is in the Dumbo neighborhood of Brooklyn. His canvases are technically polished yet conceptually playful. Previous works have depicted an uncommon array of subjects: kittens sprawled out next to guns; hunks of raw meat hanging from hooks. His most recent body of work, on view through January 4 at Hasted Kraeutler gallery in New York, is rife with visual jokes and allusions from art history.

Many of these latest paintings feature young, mostly blonde women caught in the act of observing art. Dennis considers them "surrogates," and delights in what he considers the voyeuristic layering within each work. He's mixed famous paintings-within-paintings, such as Caravaggio's *Sick Bacchus*, with canvases in which the blonde spectators eye recastings of his own works. And in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, 2013, Dennis has imagined a wholly fictional sculpture—a pile of roses arrayed in a pyramid, à la Felix Gonzalez-Torres's candy stacks—and

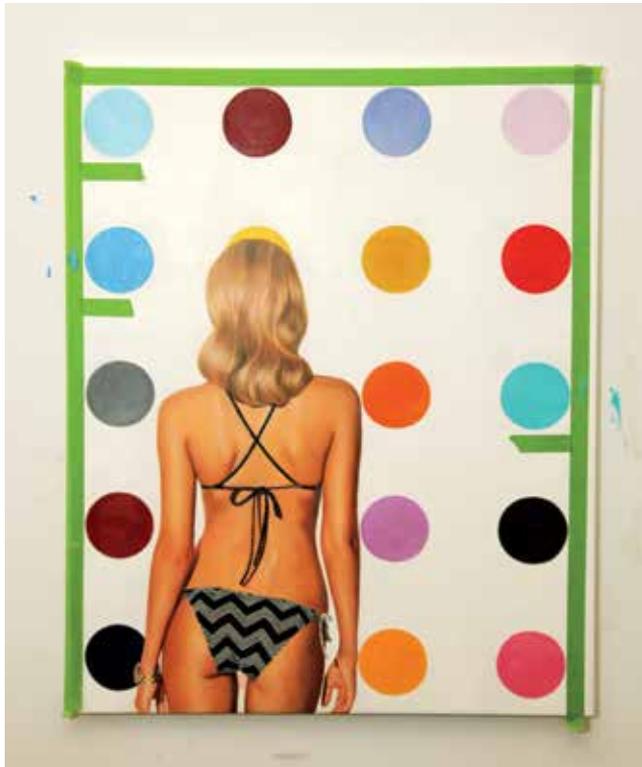
Painted it, tempting viewers to mistake it for an existing work from the art historical canon. Dennis's diverse inspirations are apparent from the artifacts and quotes dotting his studio walls: a photograph of Sitting Bull (Dennis lived on a South Dakotan Indian reservation for three months); a postcard of Diego Velázquez's 1656 *Las Meninas*, which he considers one of the greatest paintings of all time; and a quote from Edgar Allan Poe on the way in which "absurd combinations produce humor." **MP**

▶ **THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF GEOMETRY IN THE MIND OF SOMEONE IN A BIKINI**

"The pattern on the bikini is from one of Frank Stella's earliest paintings. When explaining his 'Spot' paintings, Damien Hirst absurdly used Stella as an example when talking about his new form of geometric abstraction. I thought it would be cool to put a chick in a Stella-designed bikini in front of a 'Spot' painting, as a surrogate for our true thoughts and feelings on Hirst's work."

▶ **SKETCHBOOKS**

"Here's a whole bunch of ideas from the Hasted Kraeufler show before I even painted them. This is how they start."



◀ **HAIR DRAWINGS**

"This was done on the fall convocation brochure for Elmira College, where I teach. I have a Japanese brush pen, the type that comic-book artists use. I'll draw the backs of peoples' heads—students, parents, faculty. I really like it as a drawing—the negative space between the heads. I'm into a sort of order versus chaos all the time."



▶ **BRUINS PUCK**

"I used to play hockey, and I'm a big sports fan. I caught this puck at the Boston Garden in 1998. It's always with me. When I was a little boy, there were times that I turned to hockey for solace. It's aggressive, fast, intense, and there's an element of surprise that blows my mind. And that's what I like about painting, too."

◀ **A GREAT MASTERY OF PRIVACY**

"*Sick Bacchus* is an early self-portrait by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, dated between 1593 and 1594. It's in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. I chose this piece because I felt it was the best fit for my idea for my own painting: A historical and somewhat famous work in a make-believe private collection. Instead of letting Bacchus remain sick, I painted blood into his body, giving him a rather excited pulse."

