

BORTOLAMI

Ivan Morley

Hyperion

18 June – 30 July 2021

Opening Friday, 18 June from 5pm-8pm

Bortolami Gallery is pleased to announce *Hyperion*, Ivan Morley's third solo exhibition with the gallery. Morley's distinct, vivid compositions are sewn in embroidery thread with watercolor on canvas or painted on glass that is slicked with water-based lubricant, peeled away with the aid of razors, and transferred to panel in one giant, layered skin of sumptuous oils.

The embroidered works are like lavish tapestries modeled in a chiaroscuro of near-like color palettes. Their chromatic combinations surprise, evoking the ethos and immediacy of gestural painting despite their slow and methodical creation by sewing machine. Morley dampens the thread to stretch the canvas, causing the watercolor underneath to bleed up through the surface. This effectively softens the edges in the work, transforming tapestry into painting and further blurring distinctions of figuration and abstraction – more specifically, the bits of text and recognizable form which emerge from the ether of Morley's expressive ground.

For this new series of works, Morley has found supple inspiration from personal memories and artifacts of long-vanished spaces along Hyperion Avenue in his longtime home of Los Angeles. The street, which subtly divides the neighborhoods of Silver Lake and Los Feliz, has intersected with Morley's own life at various junctures: first at an alternative “hippie” kindergarten, then where he attended house parties in the 1980s, and again as an artist working in a studio down the street. These lived experiences have been distilled with bits of California folklore to form a patchwork of pseudo-historical narratives which inform one another, a process highly generative to Morley's practice.

One such motif in these works is a recurring visage of orange groves. They are studies for a public painting that Morley had long dreamed of installing on an empty billboard on Hyperion Avenue. This large “blank canvas,” now torn down, served as an apt projection for the artist's own freewheeling visual associations. The oranges evoke the advertising aesthetics of Morley's childhood in 1960s California but truly originate from a fascination with a tiled ceramic wall of a train station seen during a visit to Valencia, Spain.

Morley further collapses these painterly conventions and California history with repeated renditions of a figure in a red flamenco dress, another Spanish influence and a nod to the “fandango” dance parties of 19th century Los Angeles. (An investigation from Morley's *Fandango* works of 2018-2019.) The model, however, sports an anachronistic chest tattoo which spells out Ian Curtis' famed, eponymous lyric from the 1980 Joy Division song, *Love Will Tear Us Apart*.

Another work depicts the signage of Frog Pond, a long-shuttered queer bar and cabaret formerly housed on Hyperion Avenue. The top of the composition is framed by shower heads which spray tear-shaped water droplets. A grove of citrus sits below, a fitting image of growth in Morley's expansive, ever-growing oeuvre.

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Ivan Morley (b. 1966, Burbank, California) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has exhibited at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom; The Schürmann Collection in Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany and the Goetz Collection, Munich, Germany. His works are in the public collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Kunstsammlung Nordheim-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst.