

Alex Dordoy

Answering Machine

November 10 – January 6, 2023
GRIMM, 2 Bourdon Street (UK)



Alex Dordoy | *Kindling the March Wind*, 2022

GRIMM is pleased to present *Answering Machine*, an exhibition of new paintings by Alex Dordoy, on view in London opening on November 10, 2022. This will be the artist's sixth solo exhibition with GRIMM since 2010 and his first at the newly-opened London space.

Dordoy's latest group of paintings continue his exploration of intervening with found imagery, blending technological and analogue modes of representation. Vintage travel posters, stock images and fleeting smartphone photographs are often the starting point in Dordoy's works, which become subjected to various levels of digital manipulation before being re-rendered in acrylic on canvas.

At each stage of the process of selecting, editing and painting an image, various calculated decisions come into play to alter the final outcome of the picture and its associated meanings. Distortions within the colour palette, along with compositional doctoring and cropping allows for a recalibration of each source image, stripping it of its historical context to create an openness within its narrative. The end result leaves each painting pointing in various directions. Wide open landscapes are both romantic yet foreboding, figures are familiar yet anonymous, still lifes reveal traces of their origins but are not quite what they seem.

The exhibition derives its title *Answering Machine* from one of the central paintings within the show, referring to an interest in written language and the recording and representation of language. In the painting we are presented with the exhibition's only interior scene, of a church viewed from the nave towards the altar, cast in hues of deep blue. It is a pointed entry to the themes of the exhibition, creating a sense of pictorial depth into and out of which each viewer might project their own thoughts and memories. The altar itself acts as a kind of platform from which ideas, histories, myths and morals emerge, encapsulating themes at work in Dordoy's paintings.

In *A Few Careless Words*, we see a vast seascape with crisp waves rolling and crashing at the base of distant mountains. The setting sun casts a pink glow on the snowy mountain peaks below the encircling clouds whose delicate brushwork belies the graphic first-impression of the image. It is, on its surface, a seductive scene, recalling a long history of paintings of the sublime and overpowering forces of nature. On closer inspection, however, it is a work that reveals just as much by what has been omitted. At the centre of the painting is a white wave breaking seemingly against nothing, stopping short of the rocky outcrop before it. This is just one example of where the artist intervenes with a found image to create a clash of contexts. In this case the source is a marine battle scene by the British painter Norman Wilkinson (1878-1971), whose version depicts the white wave breaking against warring vessels.

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This type of intervention is characteristic of Dordoy's method, in which a small gesture creates a critical juncture between two possible outcomes, of potential levity or grave seriousness, the archetypal and the specific, the new and the historical. As with a number of other paintings in the exhibition, the obscured history of the image is hinted at by its title; *A Few Careless Words* referring to the World War II era idiom 'loose lips sink ships.'

This interrelationship between written language and visual language continues in *Kindling the March Wind*, with a title inspired by the poetry of William Morris alluding to the complexity of ideas alluding to the complexity of ideas about romantic or patriotic visions of nature. With its composition culled from a vintage travel poster advertising travel to the British countryside in the 1930s, it connects the past and present in striking ways. Suffused with the warmth of early twentieth century graphic design, it is an image that originally promoted an idealised version of England as arcadia, full of promise and opportunity outside of urban centres. In Dordoy's version, however, there is an acknowledgement of this promise being unfulfilled, with its saturated palette creating a more otherworldly atmosphere. The forest setting is also specifically distanced from any clearly identifiable location through this use of colour, with striking red leaves and magenta light falling over the scene disrupting any known place and time. The epic scale of the trees envelop the two children positioned by a campfire, who on the one-hand seem emblematic of an almost cinematic, coming-of-age story but may also be seen as quite at odds with their environment, their miniature size creating a sense of indifference or loneliness, undermining the saccharine nature of the original advertisement.

Viewable from outside the gallery is a site-specific mural depicting an eerie twilight view of Stonehenge, over which hangs *Back to the Fuchsia*, a rare figurative work by the artist, derived from a stock image. In the painting, the figure's face is obscured by a handheld mirror, the edges of which dissolve into the negative space of the painting itself, revealing the process of production itself. In what the artist has described as a painterly analogy of chemical sublimation, the image is in an act of transformation from something solid and tangible to something almost evaporating before the viewer's eyes.

In *Birthday Candle* the artist works from his own photograph of an object in a museum display cases, revealing the traces of the technology that captured these images - and his own authorship - by deliberately painting the reflection or glare of light against the glass. Crucial information about the objects and their settings is withheld, deflecting the viewer away from the reality of what is being depicted. In *Birthday Candle*, the withering leaves are transformed into moths on the cusp of flight, or perhaps the moths are transformed into leaves, decaying and motionless.



Alex Dordoy | *Birthday Candle*, 2022

About the artist

Alex Dordoy (b. 1985 in Newcastle, UK) lives and works in London (UK). He received his BFA from the Glasgow School of Art (UK) in 2007 and completed the residency program at De Ateliers, Amsterdam (NL) in 2009.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Monster*, GRIMM, Amsterdam (NL) in 2022; *The Weather Channel*, The Modern Institute, Glasgow (UK) in 2021; *Ruin is Rune*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US) in 2020; *Summers' Ego*, GRIMM, Amsterdam (NL) in 2018; *The Moss is Dreaming*, curated by Tom Morton, Blain|Southern, London (UK); *From Svalbard Soil*, The Modern Institute, Glasgow (UK) in 2017; *Model T*, The Modern Institute, Glasgow (UK) in 2015; *Sleepwalker*, De Ateliers Debut Series, Kunstmuseum, The Hague (NL); and *Persistencebeatsresistance*, Inverleith House, Edinburgh (UK) in 2014.

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