

“Ivan Morley,” *WSIMag.com*, January 27, 2017

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## Ivan Morley

12 Jan — 18 Feb 2017 at Bortolami in New York, United States  
27 January 2017



Ivan Morley, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Bortolami

Bortolami is pleased to announce Ivan Morley’s second exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition will present his new works as well as a selection of earlier paintings, providing an overview of the Los Angeles-based artist’s distinct bodies of works.

Morley’s embroideries, paintings, and works on glass are uniquely American. They come from a tradition of West Coast American painting that developed a distinct visual language of its own, generated as a countercurrent to European traditions. Like Jim Shaw, Mike Kelley, and Paul McCarthy, Morley’s oeuvre is fueled by Americana. These artists draw from a wide range of sources: comic book culture, punk and alt-rock music, and 1970s psychedelia. These references, piled atop each other, take part in so-called “clusterfuck aesthetics,” juxtaposing pop imagery with emblems of varied American subcultures. Rat Fink, Kustom Kulture, African masks as tourist tchotchkes, Indonesian-inspired batiked tapestries that adorn college dorm rooms, and pot smoke’s purple haze. These visual touchpoints emphasize this country’s counter-cultural heritage as folkloric fodder.

The specific narratives that Morley references; *A True Tale* and *Tehachepi*, (sic), refer to anecdotes that Morley has painted many times over, culled from memoirs of the old west. The stories recount southern California in its nascency; the former involving an entrepreneur who made a fortune shipping cats to a rat-infested city, and the latter about native family life in a town where the wind was so strong it could alter the trajectory of a bullet. But the precise subject, origin, or narrative of each tale is hardly the point. Rather, he renders visual elements along each story’s periphery, allowing a single detail to shift and mutate via paint and thread.

Certain motifs in Morley’s paintings; like paint drips, wooden planks, and bullet holes, “morph and migrate from piece to piece and from narrative to narrative, problematizing the issue of meaning and drawing attention to the power of context.” As a result, those original stories fall apart, just as repeating a word over and over causes it to lose its meaning. By keeping the subject matter consistent, by continuing to layer upon layer, one might consider that his paintings achieve a phenomenon of the present tense rather than retrospection.

Morley’s elaborate embroideries accompany his equally elaborate paintings, which he assembles on lubricated glass and then peels off in skins, applying them to panel. These idiosyncratic processes began as his reaction against the restrictions of traditional Euro-centric painting methods, and are now simply an alternative way of rendering equally alternative narratives. Morley’s materials are as much the content of the work as the original stories from which the paintings were born.

Ivan Morley (b. 1966 in Burbank, California) is an artist living and working in Los Angeles. His work has been shown at LAMoCA, the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach, Germany, and the Kunstsammlung Nordheim-Westfalen in Düsseldorf. Morley attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.