

KENTON NELSON

Being Beautiful is not Enough

by Erika Schlessinger-Költzsch



2019, "Quiescence" oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches - © Kenton Nelson.
Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.

In times of streaming platforms, NFTs, Artificial Intelligence and Metaverse I like to watch occasionally American movies from the 30's, 40's, 50's or 60's and let myself be carried away into another time, even if it's only for 2 to 3 hours. I love "Gone with the Wind" with Vivien Leigh und Clark Gable, or the movies with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall or those with Carry Grant and Katherine Hepburn or Burt Lancaster. There I find beautiful people, well dressed, who know how to behave. Good and bad things happen to them, they act in fateful situations and react cool or helpless or melodramatic. In any case, emotional and yet with composure. We all hope that these films close with the "happy end". That's what we all want in life, right?

Kenton Nelson also loves these kind of films, and also likes to see elegantly dressed, well-acting people and makes them the subject of his pictures. And he does it in a masterful manner! However, just to turn the resurrection of old times and old ideals into pictures would be too little to speak of a quality painting and a fascinating work. Kenton Nelson takes all this to set in motion a highly sensitive and intelligent game that, once we get involved, hardly lets us go. And he digs far deeper.



2020, "Pleasure and Restoration" oil on canvas, 38 x 96 inches - © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.

2021, "Summer Pallet" oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches- © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2021, “#34 The Swimmer” oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2021, “#36 Night” oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



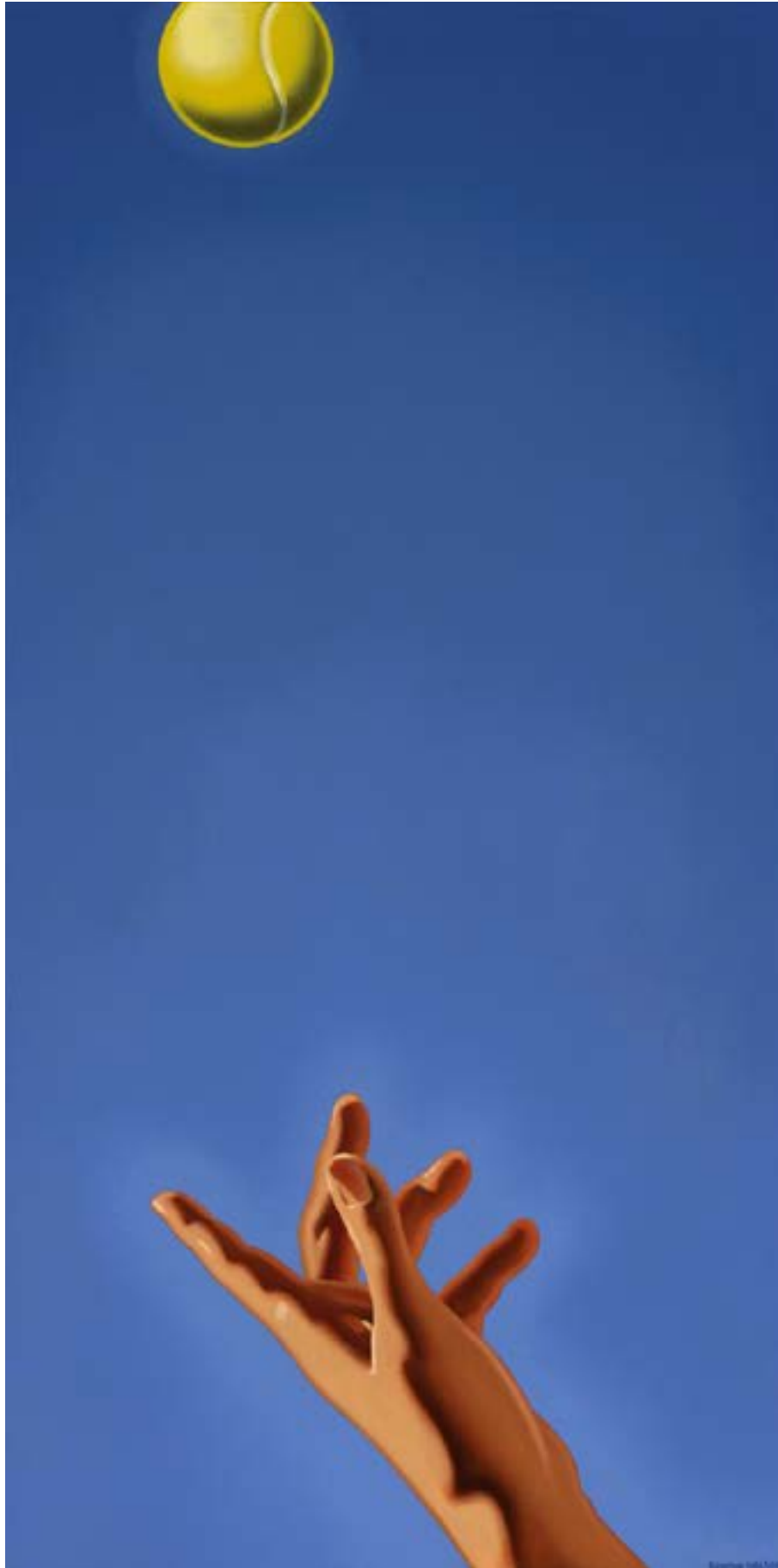
2021, “#15 Suggestion” oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



In the three wonderful paintings «The Swimmer», «Suggestion» and «Night», the artist lets us see in each case into a part of a swimming pool, in which seemingly simple reflections and accessories appear, referring us to another narrative level. This is not just a roof of a house, a tree and some clouds or a sun reflection with a partly filled glass or full moon with dark tree silhouettes. The title «Swimmer» lead us to film plot based on a short story of the same title by John Cheever. Film director Frank Perry transformed this story into a powerful film, with Burt Lancaster as the «swimmer» Ned Merrill, showing the journey of a man who suffers

an emotional and psychological breakdown and in the end becomes a social outlaw. «Where have you been keeping yourself?» asks a man dressed in a strip flannel shirt and pink shorts in the first third of the film. «Oh here and there, here and there,» replies Ned and then in a broad smile he gazes up into the bright blue sky and adds, «What a day! Did you ever see such a glorious day?». In the final scenes of the film we come to understand that Ned`s reality has in fact collapsed. His wife has divorced him and he became a foreigner for his two daughters. When he finally arrives back at his home after his long journey of swimming we discover

that he has no home anymore and that he became excluded from the intimate world of affluence to which he once belonged. The works, which are formally convincing as great pictorial compositions, suggest an ideal world at first glance, but are ultimately references to a lost paradise or to the error of allowing oneself to be blinded by appearances.



2022, "Service" oil on panel, 36 x 18 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.

Two other works, «Service» and «Prose» are dealing with similar double or triple meaning levels. The match ball in "Service" can fall to the right or wrong side of the net, depending on the whim of fate like in the movie with the same title by Woody Allen.

"Pros" indexes several possibilities. The pros of the golf elite, the pros for a cause, but also the binding of all pros into a given grid, from which one cannot escape. Being a pro does not mean being free to do whatever you want.



2022, "Prose" oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2021, "Social Network" oil on canvas, 30 x 60 inches
 © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2020, "A Rivalry" oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
 © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.

A "Rivalry" and "Social Network", two paintings with different motifs, complement each other in their statements in a wonderful way. Being chained together does not always mean belonging together and also in social networking one can be lonely and abandoned. And all this in the most beautiful formal language, in elegance and composure.

Kenton Nelson gives us settings, like film scenes from a Cinescope strip. They suggest supposed aspects. "Obstacles and competition" is what the artist called one of his past exhibitions. The question is: who has obstacles to overcome or faces competition, the image figures or us?

Kenton Nelson formulates and composes his images in such a way that we cannot tell exactly what is really meant. That's intentional. Also, that what we end up interpreting into his images has more to do with us and our current emotional situation than with the actual representation. It depends on this whether we perceive "obstacles and competition" as challenging and stimulating or as paralyzing and depressing.



2020, "Micro Racer" oil on panel, 18 x 36 inches
 © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2020, "Recreation and Chores" oil on canvas, 38 x 96 inches
 © Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.

Kenton Nelson addresses our subconscious through his settings. We are confronted with situations that bring to mind our own experiences and the feelings and emotions that accompany them. We are inside and outside the images. We are sentient and spectator, we are active and passive. We are emotionally involved. It is a game that Kenton Nelson plays with us: a highly subtle and well-calculated, an extremely intelligent and complexly aesthetic game. It is a game that he masters perfectly and in which we follow him with fascination because it confuses and

enriches us at the same time. We are part of his production and, depending on how tuned in we are, we are friendly admirers or excluded envious or fearful fellow envious - only one thing is certain: Kenton Nelson's pictures never leave us cold. And their longing factor brings us back to the wonderful Hollywood classics that once again appeal to our emotional side.

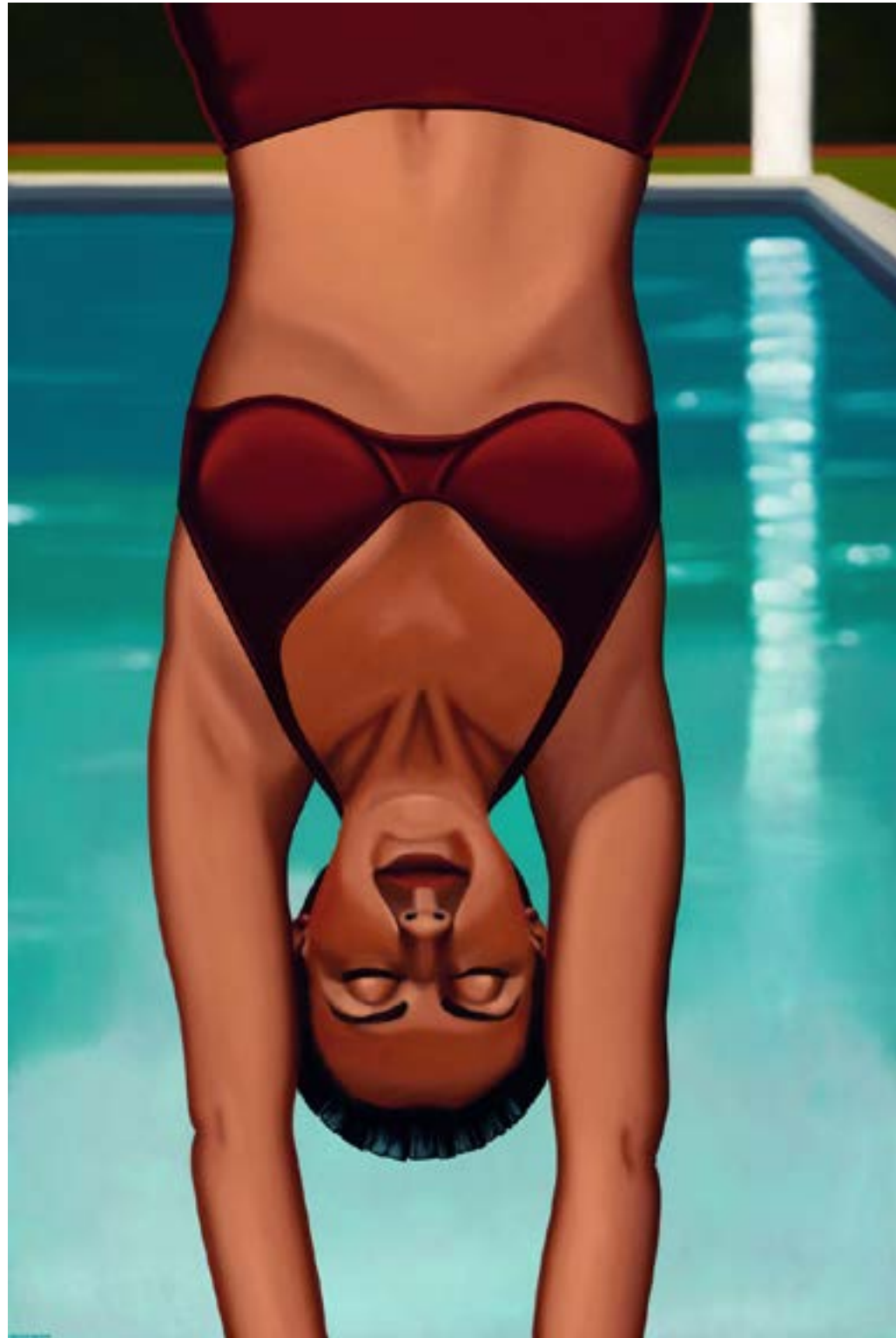
Kenton Nelson was born in 1954 and raised in Los Angeles, CA. He attended Long Beach State University and Otis Parsons Art Institute, and for the last 40

years has had his art studio in Pasadena, CA. He has been on the faculty of the Otis Parsons Art Institute in Los Angeles and the Academy of Art in San Francisco.

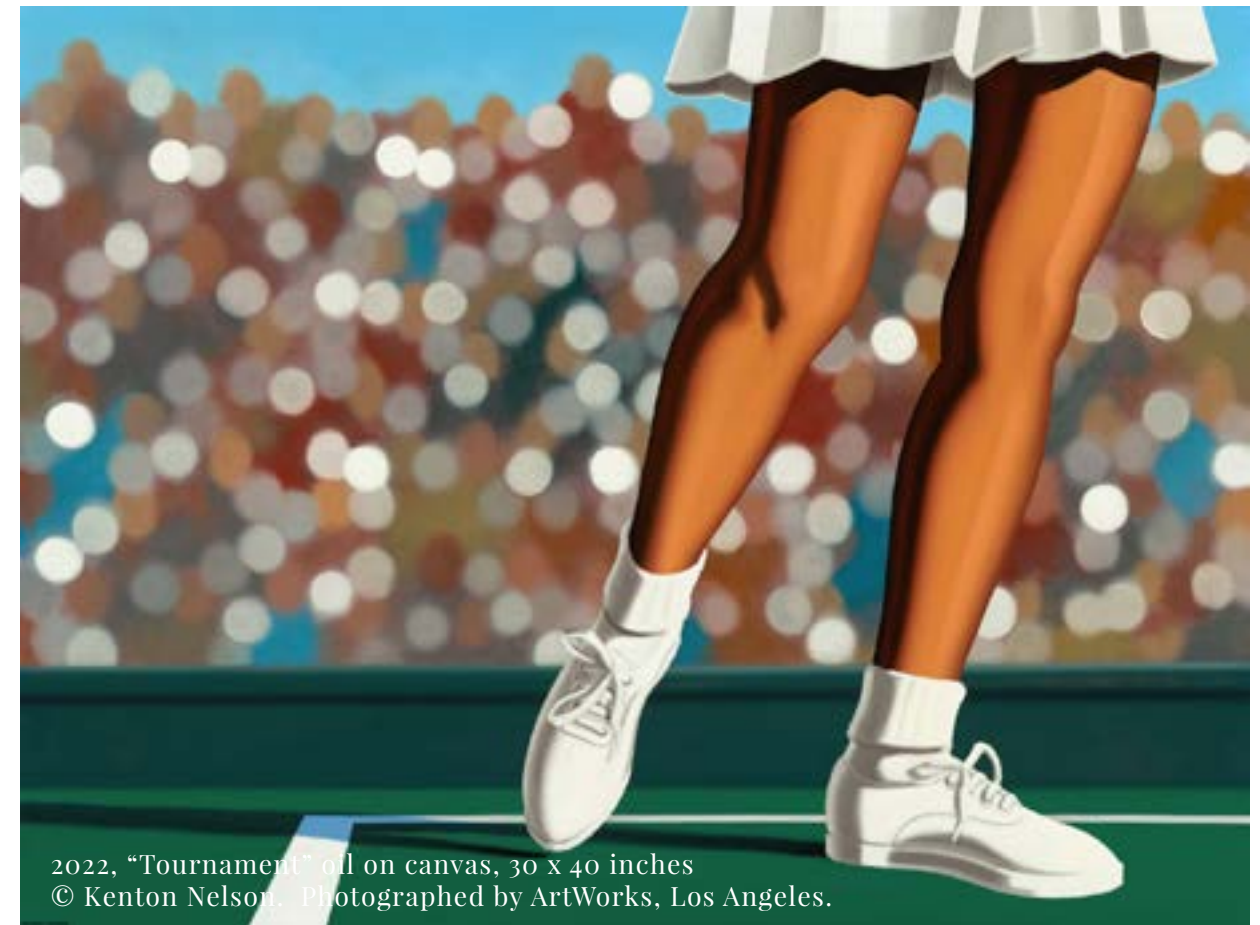
Nelson traces his interest in painting back to his great uncle, Roberto Montenegro, renowned Mexican muralist and Modernist. The style of Nelson's paintings have their origins in American Scene painting, Regionalism, and the work of the WPA artists of the 1930's. Nelson paints a distinctly California regionalism to idealize the ordinary with

the intention of engagement, using the iconic symbols and styles of his lifetime in a theatrical style to make leading suggestions, not unlike the advertisements of his youth.

Nelson's paintings have been featured seven times on the cover of The New Yorker magazine. Recent exhibitions of Nelson's work have been enjoyed from Los Angeles to Stuttgart, Berlin, Zurich, and Salzburg.



2021, "Prepossessed" oil on canvas, 60 x 40 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2022, "Tournament" oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



2021, "Near the Cliff" oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



Coastal Rabble #1
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.



Coastal Rabble #2
© Kenton Nelson. Photographed by ArtWorks, Los Angeles.