



THE DIFFICULT PART

BRIAN KERSHNIK:
A MID-CAREER RETROSPECTIVE

AUGUST 16, 2024 – MAY 3, 2025



Bearing News, 2000, oil on panel, 29 x 75 inches

TIP #1: TITLE

For Brian Kershisnik, titles are like poetry. Typically, he includes the title directly on the canvas, encouraging viewers to engage with it directly. Sometimes, he assigns a title before finishing the work, and multiple paintings often have the same title, to reflect the themes and questions Kershisnik is concerned about. Kershisnik brings questions to his canvases, articulating them in paint so that viewers find their own answers rather than being instructed what to think. Thus, his works are an open dialogue in which titles serve as the gateway to a conversation.

Look at the painting titled *Bearing News* (2000). How does this title help you understand the painting? Why do you think the artist chose that particular title?



Jesus and the Angry Babies,
2014, oil on canvas on panel,
48 x 30 inches

SIDE NOTE:

Kershisnik feels that “humor is healthy” and a natural part of the human experience. In his works, he deliberately uses irony and humor when approaching difficult subjects like death, as well as everyday subjects including children and faith. Titles like *Jesus and the Angry Babies* (2014) use humor to make the painting’s themes more authentic and relatable.



Nativity, 2006, oil on canvas, 88 x 204 inches

TIP #2: SUBJECT MATTER

When asked to describe his style, Kershnik said: “I think of it as somewhat of a mythological autobiography. They are all paintings of my own experience. . . . They’re not visual [self-portraits], but emotional self-portraits, or paintings about the idea of being a person.”

Unlike many artists, Kershnik does not work from live models, but paints “from the process of being alive,” as he is inspired by his own life experiences. For that reason, even when his works depict historical subject matter, they also address more universal themes about what it means to be alive. Like the midwives in *Nativity* (2006), Kershnik’s paintings might not draw exclusively on the accuracy of historical accounts, but instead draws on a kind of “emotional accuracy” derived from his personal experiences, in witnessing other births.



The Rescue, 2003, oil on paper on panel, 22 x 30 inches

The Rescue (2003) depicts a man fighting off a lion. You may not have wrestled a lion, but what situations have you wrestled with? What emotions are portrayed in this work? What has Kershnik captured that resonates with you?



Halo Repair, 2006, oil on canvas, 88 x 40 inches

DID YOU NOTICE?

Kershnik often includes animals—especially dogs—in his artworks. As in *Halo Repair* (2006), the animals regularly perceive things humans are unable to see, like heavenly hosts.

TIP #3: PATTERN

A strong visual element within Kershnik's signature style is his use of patterns. Taking inspiration from modern artists such as Picasso and Bonnard, who applied flattened patterns in their art, Kershnik also uses repetitive designs to create texture and define space. Like mosaics in Byzantine art, these patterns call attention to what the artist calls the "mythological space" they depict.

A key pattern used in Kershnik's works are his "elevens," or vertical lines of "ones" that differentiate space in a unique way when repeatedly stacked. He drew inspiration for this while looking at Van Gogh's paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, noticing how the Dutch painter used dashes to indicate the changing planes of space in his wheat fields.

You can see this technique in Kershnik's painting *Gardening in the Rain* (2007). Notice how the rain is formed by "elevens." Compare this to the use of patterns in *Climbing Mother* (2014) on the cover. Patterns create a distinctive texture in a work, but here they also create movement and energy. What other patterns can you identify in Kershnik's work? How would these paintings be different without the use of patterns?



Gardening In the Rain, 2007, oil on canvas, 84 x 66 inches



Planting the Trees, 2024, bronze sculpture, 12 inches



Young Immortals Planting Trees, 2019, oil on canvas, 36 x 54 inches

TIP #4: MEDIUM

An artwork's material can impact its meaning. Walk around the sculpture *Planting the Trees* (2024) and view it from various sides and angles. How would your experience of this sculpture change if it was made from glass, wood, or another material?

Now compare the sculpture to the painting *Young Immortals Planting Trees* (2019). How are these two works similar? In what ways are they different? What does each work communicate through to its material?

DID YOU KNOW?

Kershisnik earned a Master's of Fine Arts in printmaking, a technique that tends to reduce visual depth. Elements of this flattening effect can be seen in his unique style.

Scan this QR code to hear the artist share how he came to work with different media and how it affects his work.



TIMELINE:

- 1962: Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- 1967–1980: Grows up in Angola, Thailand, Texas, and Pakistan
- 1980: Enrolls at the University of Utah
- 1983: Transitions from pottery to oil painting and printmaking
- 1986: Dolores Chase Fine Art represents Kershnik, jumpstarting his professional career
- 1987: Study abroad in London researching original drawings at the British Museum
- 1988: Graduates with a BFA from Brigham Young University
- 1991: Graduates from the University of Texas at Austin with an MFA in printmaking
- 1991: Moves to Kanosh, Utah, where he establishes his first professional studio
- 1992: Mark Hartshorn becomes his publisher, leading to a connection with Guild Publishing, subsequently resulting in the publication of Kershnik's first book, titled *Painting from Life* in 2002
- 2008: Opens an additional studio location in Provo, Utah
- 2010: Granted the Utah Governor's Mansion Artist Award
- 2011: Selected for the Art in Embassies Program to exhibit at the US Embassy in Kuwait
- 2013: Selected by 15 Bytes as one of Utah's 15 Most Influential Artists
- 2015: Meets Victor Amor and begins sculpting
- 2017: Invited by The Center for Latter-day Saint Arts in New York City to serve on advisory board

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