

Max Xeno Karnig (b. 1990, New York) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Karnig's practice centers on a fundamental paradox inherited from historical Western European painting: a gaze that simultaneously draws subjects near while holding them at an impossible, formally-suspended distance. Karnig wrestles with this tension in every work, employing compositional schemes and painting techniques characteristic of allegorical portraits by painters like Albrecht Dürer or Antonello da Messina, as well as modern and contemporary influences like Balthus and John Currin. Where Old Masters applied reverence to saints and mythological figures, Karnig chooses known and unknown faces of Western cinema as his subjects, as well as members of his personal life. By eschewing photographic realism in favor of this older language of idealization, a quince, a vase of flowers, a smoker, a torso, a son are all rendered with meticulous, unachievable devotion, softened and illuminated through careful brushwork.

Karnig received an MFA from University of California, Irvine in 2019. Solo and two-person exhibitions include: Dream Story, House of Seiko, San Francisco (2025); The Most Beautiful Boy in the World, CASTLE, Los Angeles (2024); The Scallop Shell, Half Gallery Annex, New York (2024). Group exhibitions include: Another Man's Treasure, Mariposa Gallery, Aspen (2025); American Unframed, American Arts Projects, Berlin (2025); Modele Vivant, Jack Siebert Projects, Los Angeles (2025); Nature Morte, The Artist Room, London (2025); Apparitions, Sea View, Los Angeles (2024).