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Painting a Perfect World

Kenton Nelson

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Text by Kenton Nelson

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- Iconic Visual Language Rooted in American Culture: Kenton Nelson's paintings draw from the collective visual memory of 20th-century America, evoking the aesthetics of New Deal-era murals, 1930s–50s advertising, and American Scene Painting
- Richly Illustrated Publication: Features a comprehensive selection of artworks, offering deep insight into Nelson's evolving visual world
- Includes an accompanying essay and a thoughtful interview with the artist, providing both contextual analysis and intimate reflections
- International Collaboration: Produced in partnership with Galerie Nikolaus Ruzicska (Salzburg) and Peter Mendenhall Gallery (Pasadena)—a transatlantic celebration of Nelson's oeuvre

Kenton Nelson's art is rooted in the collective visual memory of American popular culture. His paintings navigate between nostalgia and enigma, between a perfect surface and hidden tensions. Stylistically, they draw on elements of public murals from the New Deal era, simultaneously calling to mind the visual language of advertisements from the 1930s to 1950s and American Scene Painting. However, this controlled, formal order conceals a quiet melancholy and the sensation that this supposedly perfect world is merely imagined.

This publication, created in collaboration with Galerie Nikolaus Ruzicska, Salzburg, and Peter Mendenhall Gallery, Pasadena, honours Kenton Nelson's oeuvre with numerous images, alongside an accompanying essay and an interview with the artist.

Text in English and German.

Kenton Nelson was born in 1954 in Pasadena, California, and is today considered one of the most prominent figurative painters of the American West Coast. After studying at California State University in Long Beach and continuing his education at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, he initially worked for many years as an illustrator and graphic designer. Later, he taught at Otis College as well as at the Academy of Art in San Francisco before dedicating himself entirely to painting in the 1990s. Nelson's works are influenced by American idealism of the 1930s, the WPA painters, and the aesthetics of advertising and commercial graphics. His style is often described as "narrative idealism" – he creates scenes of everyday life that captivate through strong lighting, clear lines, and subtle tension. Thematically, he frequently addresses the ambivalence between external idyll and inner unrest. His works are reminiscent of the era between modernity and the post-war period. He has exhibited internationally and his works are held in important private and public collections, as well as in numerous corporate and private collections in the USA and Europe. Additionally, several of his paintings have been published as covers of *The New Yorker*, and his works are also present in film and architecture – for example in wall mosaics or film scenes such as in *Something's Gotta Give* (2003).







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