

PERROTIN

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**Nikki MALOOF**

*Collectible DRY,*  
*NIKKI'S INNER LIGHT*

*February 2025*



**MONTBLANC**

Rupert Friend and his Extreme 3.0 Backpack  
with M LOCK 4810 Buckle.

DRY

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FUTŪRA

COLLECTIBLE  
**DRY**

NIKKI MALOOF  
IN DRIES VAN NOTEN  
BY OLIVIA GHALIOUNGUI



COLLECTIBLE DRY ISSUE 28 SPRING 2025

**FUTŪRA**

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IMAGE **OLIVIA GHALIOUNGUI**  
CREATIVE DIRECTION AND STYLE **MONICA PILLOSIO**  
STARRING **NIKKI MALOOF**  
WORDS **DAVID HERMAN**

# NIKKI'S INNER LIGHT

Black wool-blend coat, cotton straight-leg pants, leather mules  
with curved platform **DRIES VAN NOTEN**





“I THINK THERE IS AN INTERESTING LINK BETWEEN THE WORLD OF COMICS AND THE SIMPLIFIED FIGURES AND SPACES OF EARLY RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS.”

NIKKI MALOOF, *Tired Mother*, 2024. Oil on linen. 76.2 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Oversized double-breasted blazer in wool gabardine, cotton poplin shirt with high collar and long cuffs **DRIES VAN NOTEN**

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NIKKI MALOOF, *Things that grow*, 2024. Oil on linen, 72 x 114 cm. Photo @Claire Dorn. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.





“THE STYLIZING OF MY FIGURES WITH A CARTOONISH QUALITY  
ADDS A DIMENSION OF HUMOR THAT I THINK IS A NECESSARY INGREDIENT FOR MY WORLD.”



NIKKI MALOOF, *The Cut*, 2024. Oil on linen, 121,9 x 139,7 cm.  
Photo @Claire Dorn. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Double-breasted oversize blazer in cotton gabardine and linen,  
cotton straight leg pants, leather mules with curved platform **DRIES VAN NOTEN**

NIKKI MA LOOF, *The First Supper*, 2024. Oil on linen, 208.3 x 152.4 cm.  
Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Make up HIND SOUSAN  
 Hair RICHARD BLANDEL  
 Style coordinator LUCIE AMSON  
 Style assistant ASIA BALDANZI

Double-breasted oversize blazer in cotton gabardine and linen,  
 cotton straight leg pants, faux fur vest, leather mules with curved platform **DRIES VAN NOTEN**



NIKKI MALOOF, *Morning Window*, 2024. Oil on linen, 182.9 x 121.9 cm.  
 NIKKI MALOOF, *Night Rituals*, 2024. Oil on linen, 182.9 x 121.9 cm.  
 Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



A POETIC EXPLORATION OF DOMESTICITY AND TIME

NIKKI MALOOF  
IN CONVERSATION WITH  
DAVID HERMAN

On the occasion of *Around the Clock*, her first solo exhibition at Perrotin Gallery in Paris, Nikki Maloof invites us into the depths of her “inner world”, where light-filled, vibrant scenes are in permanent tension with darker, more unsettling undertones. Following in the footsteps of writers like Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, the young American painter crafts a poetic and theatrically charged depiction of her domestic life as both an artist and a young mother, secluded in her Victorian home in Massachusetts. With a sharp and exuberant gaze, Maloof offers an incisive reflection on the female condition while delving into the existential anxieties of time. Her radical style, oscillating between the alluring and the uncanny, draws from revered periods in art history and the decorative arts, merging these influences with more obscure references or ironic nods to pop culture. In her work, the legacy of the Romantic female avant-garde finds a compelling new heir.

Each painting appears to correspond to a domestic space and a different time of day. Can you share more about the narrative behind this exhibition?

I think of this show itself as a house with each painting depicting a different room. I want to capture a sense of time passing from piece to piece as if you’re seeing snapshots throughout a given time period within this home. The figures found are also caught in a moment in time, frozen mid-thought. Artists have been examining our relationship to the passing of time for centuries, maybe forever. It’s a subject that I find myself returning to again and again. I think becoming a mother amplified my interest. Nothing complicates, highlights, and broadens your sense of time quite like children.

Emily Dickinson in the 19th century, Sylvia Plath in the 1950s, and Nikki Maloof in the 2020s – three “artist-poets” who, from their secluded homes in Massachusetts, navigate the inner meanderings of the feminine condition through the autobiographical lens of daily domestic life. Do you see a “law of natural cycles” in this recurring romantic theme?

There is certainly a natural cycle of women contemplating their lives from the vantage point of a domestic setting because we have predominantly commanded this world and all the pressures and expectations that accompany it. I cannot claim live in the same conditions as these poets, yet it is true that there is a part of each of us that could equally revel in the world of the home, and also chafe against its structures. For me, becoming a mother forced me to become deeply intertwined with the domestic world. This reality generates so many experiences. Feelings of joy and awe mingle with eelings of claustrophobia and angst. We can all be trapped within the limitations of everyday life at times. When I think about the lineage of the work of Dickinson and Plath, I relate strongly to the act of gathering together elements of ones immediate, intimate experiences, and forming a new realm with them, one that expands beyond reality into the fantastical, metaphysical and existential. ➤

Double-breasted oversize blazer in cotton gabardine and linen, faux fur vest **DRIES VAN NOTEN**

“PAINTING IS WHERE I ATTEMPT TO STOP TIME, AND CAPTURE THINGS BEFORE THEY EVAPORATE.”

How does everyday life give rise to Beauty? In what ways can it serve as a space of freedom?

On a daily basis profoundly, beautiful moments happen all the time. Often these occurrences pass by and we only notice them for a sechthen some other task takes up our attention. Painting is where I attempt to stop time, and capture things before they evaporate. Having a subject that you can use as a framework for endless exploration is a form of freedom and for me, domestic life is always revealing things. More than enough for one lifetime. To return to Plath and Dickinson, you can think of their position within the confines of a home, Dickinson sequestered in her room, Plath left to care for children alone, as a constraint they had to contend with, but you can also think that the limitations became an engine of creativity. Not unlike the painters of early centuries whose subjects were quite limited to religious iconography. That restriction fueled the many dimensions of change and discoveries.

Your work engages with the tradition of still life, a genre deeply rooted in Flemish and Italian Renaissance painting. Yet, your luminous and dynamic approach stands in contrast to the often austere and static nature of this heritage. In *Around the Clock*, this vitality is further heightened by a more pronounced human presence. What prompted this evolution? Could it be linked to your recent experience of motherhood?

When I began painting still life, I was looking at a lot of Flemish vanities paintings. I found it thrilling and frankly, very fun to take the inert qualities from those paintings of the past and try to animate them. I wanted the dead creatures to feel alive somehow, like they were reflecting our own existential crisis back on at u s. It felt like a touch of black humor so I'm glad to hear you sensed that. Figuration has been creeping in steadily on its own. I'm always looking for new subjects/characters to explore within my world. It felt like a natural progression but I'm sure motherhood had something to do with it. My studio and home are very intertwined. They are separate spaces but “cross pollination” is inevitable due to their proximity.

In contrast to the vibrant life found in your decorative, animal, and botanical surroundings, your human figures – particularly the adults – appear devitalized and stifled. This disparity is further accentuated by the sensuality of your painting style juxtaposed against these weary, de-eroticized bodies. The tension between the external world’s exuberance and the somber interior lives of your subjects echoes the themes in *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath’s seminal work. How does Plath’s writing, and more broadly, her lived experience, continue to inform and influence your artistic practice today?

Painting is often an experience of communing with our subconscious. I find my way there through some back door that is the texture of a paint, a particular hue, a pattern or an image. The figures that appear in this world reflect my mind at work. They are caught

in some sort of recognition or anxious contemplation. Their thoughts are often difficult ones. Plath clearly worked out her inner world on the page as well, though with more precision than me. She too created images and alternate world out of her every day experience. I like many have been attracted to her fearlessness in plumbing those inner darkneses. She did it in a time when subject matter like hers was quite radical coming from a woman. Sometimes it still feels risky to go there even now.

This absence of vitality does not extend to young children, whose instinctive behaviors often draw ironic parallels with those of domestic animals. The way adults interact with both – whether in gestures of protection or expressions of unease – suggests a shared dynamic. Do these portrayals hint at a more harmonic relationship between humans and animals, one that contrasts with the estrangement often seen in our adult generations?

These paintings are primarily from a mother’s perspective so when I think of children in my work, they bounce between the uncanny experience of witnessing one’s own children and the way they reflect your childhood back at you all the time. I don’t think of the children as having a more harmonious relationship with the nature of my world because for me, nature is generally a foreboding force in my paintings. Children aren’t aware of that there. They are free from even the concept of time whereas nature is always a reminder of it.

This brings us to the question of Wild Nature, which, despite its lively and inviting presence, intrudes into the domestic space with an unsettling, even threatening force. Does this suggest a shift in balance, with Nature gaining ascendancy in our lives?

I’m really attracted to the contradictory quality of nature. It’s a place of supreme beauty and ultimate terror. We are both a part of it but also feel outside of it. These multifaceted qualities make for compelling imagery. I like to use elements of nature as a way of upsetting the serenity of a scene or adding a violent undertone. It’s always about creating a balance of tension within the work.

The only truly serene space in your paintings, conveyed through softer tones and a sense of order – as if sanctified – appears to be your studio. Do you perceive it as a place of reverence? More generally, what is your connection to the idea of the sacred?

I don’t think of myself as a particularly spiritual person. I’m not religious in any way. Yet it’s true the studio can at times feel like a sacred space. Spirituality for me is most closely felt in a painting. It is a place where one needs to leave the real world behind and go into another state of being. Things happen there which at times feel strangely outside of one’s self. Artists often have their own superstitions and rituals that have something to do with that spiritual quality. I certainly do. I’m always trying to conjure it.

“I’M REALLY ATTRACTED TO THE CONTRADICTIONARY QUALITY OF NATURE. IT’S A PLACE OF SUPREME BEAUTY AND ULTIMATE TERROR.”

The Italian Renaissance is often cited as a key influence in your work, yet Italian Mannerism – ranging from Arcimboldo’s grotesque compositions to Parmigianino’s expressive forms – remains notably absent from discussion. How do you position your practice between the Renaissance’s quest for perfection and the more dynamic, unconventional spirit of Mannerism?

I like to think of my work as trying to mash together the Northern Renaissance painters like Dirk Bouts and Van Eyck with the strange world of Mannerists and maybe the world of cartoons or children’s books. I want to go for a Frankenstein approach. I look to the Northern Renaissance for its sheer volume of visual information and the strange quality of its figuration. They feel more bizarre than those of the Italian Renaissance. I am always looking for the weird moments in these art historical periods. Mannerists work often strikes the right chord for me in that regard. I enjoy their exaggerated bodies and damatized scenes. They were free to go outside the bounds of reality which I relate to. I want a level of theatrics in my world.

Do you, like Matisse, have a deep connection to the world of music, particularly in your use of color, composition, and movement? One might think of the rhythmic quality in his *Symphonic Interiors* series, especially *Intérieur aux aubergines*. Would you say musicality plays a role in your work as well?

For me, the act of painting is not unlike a musical performance. I practice by creating drawing and studies to get the elements just right and once I feel prepared I can execute the final work. I do most of my editing beforehand so I don’t have to guess on the canvas or change things drastically. The large works are the show. I want to find the right balance of notes, moods, humor, colors, and paint textures to create the “song”. Different brushes and paints are the instruments. I often think about color as having an upbeat or cheerful sound which is paired with maybe a foreboding or melancholic image to create a dissonant sound.

Your maximalist approach is distinguished by a refined sense of taste and elegance, particularly in its command – if not mastery – of fashion and the decorative arts. References such as Prada and Renzo Mongiardino’s interiors come to mind. How do these influences shape your visual language, and where else do you find inspiration in these domains?

I derive a lot of inspiration from the world of the decorative arts, probably more than fashion. The history of the domestic world excites me a lot. My husband and I restored our 1900’s house and in the process, I became obsessed with wallpaper motifs and fabrics from different eras, particularly William Morris. I love looking at publications like World of Interiors or Apartamento for unusual interiors. My patterns and objects are an amalgam of things I have seen and things I invent. In my world, a painting is similar to a home in that it is a place where you collect things that you love and arrange them as a way of reflecting yourself or an idea. Art history, decorative items, children’s books and cartoons are all places I pull from.

The refined quality of your paintings is offset by a more exaggerated, almost satirical edge reminiscent of comic art, particularly the American underground movement of the 1970s. Do you see a connection with artists like Robert Crumb?

I can’t say I reference Crumb directly but I do really love his work and have been thinking about that era a lot while working out figuration. Crumb’s dark humor appeals to me a lot. I think there is an interesting link between the world of comics and the simplified figures and spaces of early renaissance paintings. I want to imbue my figures with a mixture of both. The stylizing of my figures with a cartoonish quality adds a dimension of humor that I think is a necessary ingredient for my world.

Nikki Maloof’s exhibition, *Around the Clock*, will be on view at Perrotin Paris, 76 Rue de Turenne, from November 2024 to February 2025. It will be followed by a forthcoming show at Perrotin Tokyo in 2025.