

Ivan Morley

Trees

November 13 – December 16, 2026

Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *Trees*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Ivan Morley. The exhibition is on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from November 13 through December 16, 2026. An opening reception will be held on Friday, November 13, 2026, from 6 – 8 PM.

Kaleidoscopic, ecstatic, and meticulously realized, the artworks in *Trees* are the result of Morley's ongoing engagement with the landscape that surrounds his Big Sur home and studio. For decades, Morley has committed himself to idiosyncratic portraits of California—as both image and historical construction—in narrative paintings that translate apocryphal stories, minor histories, and personal memories into a regional language all his own.

By a singular process that layers watercolor with machine-embroidered thread, his latest, most dazzling visions of the West suggest a sublime site in which pasts both personal and collective are held in every swaying redwood, and grandeur and fragility coexist in equal measure. Just as Morley has long challenged preconceptions that some materials are “high” while others “low,” his turn toward landscape painting, begun in 2024, quietly subverts art historical hierarchies whereby paintings are qualified, in part, by their subject matter. At the same time, *Trees* refreshes the genre as a powerful medium for awe, all the more urgent in our age of ecological devastation. Calling anthropocentrism's bluff, the artist notes that *Tanbarks* (2026) was painted “in complete awareness of the limits of art in the face of space and nature.”

As silent witnesses to millennia of change, Morley's images contain the region's sweeping past, including its prior lifetimes as a prehistoric ecosystem, home to the indigenous Esselen tribe, eventual settlement by the Spanish, and, later, as romantic bohemian haven. *Backyard* (2026) and *Front Yard* (2026), titled in relation to the artist's home, suggest an intimate familiarity emphasized by quotidian clues of the built environment (a power line, a fence, an airplane passing overhead). In capturing inland views instead of coastal ones, the majority of the paintings in *Trees* intentionally face away from the ocean—a reversal of the drive toward westward expansion packaged as Manifest Destiny, and, in a larger sense, a refusal to subscribe to its contemporary corollaries of acceleration and overconsumption. In a reference to regional lore popularized in the writings of John Steinbeck and Robinson Jeffers, the painting *Dark Watchers* (2026) alludes to local accounts of tall, silhouetted figures observed standing along the ridges of the Santa Lucia Mountains. While Morley's nocturne resists direct depictions of the paranormal, the near-psychedelic marbled and chromatic variation on offer suggests that the night sky alone, fantastic stories aside, is atmospheric enough to open metaphysical doors.

The compositions on view began as watercolors on unstretched canvas based on Morley's direct observations en plein air, as well as photographic references and memory. Through a subsequent process of embroidery, fields of interlocking color are crafted section by section. As the canvas takes shape, the two-dimensional painting becomes increasingly object-like, manipulated under and through the sewing machine. Indelible by nature, both watercolor and embroidery produce mark-making that resists revision, requiring a forward-moving process of construction in which every stitch is retained, “problems” and all. Following this ethos, Morley's

images regularly broadcast explicit evidence of their creation. In *Backyard* (2026), a red and white character at the right edge was sewn by a machine repair technician as he tested Morley's machine, and which the artist chose to simply work around, expanding the disjunction between painted world and real world, surface and depth. Throughout his work, Morley's stylistic approach dilates the space between the painterly and the graphic. The illusory fluidity of embroidered marks, and the pigment that leaches beneath, not only mimic paint's flexibility, they scramble our associations with the medium, equating, say, the expressive capacities of gestural brushwork with the fixed patterning of a decorative tapestry.

Across his oeuvre, Morley marshals the accretive qualities of visual language to get at the metamorphic feeling of time itself. Today, Big Sur is not just a region, but a geotag, an operating system, and a California ideal, even as mudslides and wildfires regularly make the actual location inaccessible. In this context, *Trees* captures a present of urgent vulnerability. As the artist describes it, "These paintings of extremely endangered, thousand-year-old trees at the literal end of the West are very much alive within history." In the months leading up to this exhibition, wildfires in and around Big Sur threatened the very monuments these images depict, as well as the sites where they were created. "I often talk about my paintings as artifacts that have fallen out of a story," Morley says. "But now, since my neighborhood is burning, they're artifacts from a war. If you looked to the left of these paintings, there'd be flames."

Ivan Morley (b. 1966, Burbank, CA) has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at David Kordansky Gallery (2025, 2022, and 2018). Selected group exhibitions include *In These Times: Recent Acquisitions at MOCA*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2026); *Abstract America Today*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2014); *The Artist's Museum*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2010); *DAS GESPINST, Die Sammlung Schürmann zu Besuch im Museum Abteiberg*, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany (2009); *Imagination Becomes Reality, Part IV: Borrowed Images*, Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2006); and *Painting in Tongues*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2006). His work is in the permanent collections of K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, CA; and University Museum of Contemporary Art at the Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst, MA. In 2020, the first comprehensive monograph dedicated to Morley was published by David Kordansky Gallery and Bortolami Gallery. Morley lives and works in Los Angeles and Big Sur, CA.