

# AUTRE

## KURT KAUPER'S PORTRAITS OF MEN ARE BOTH ARCHETYPE & SIMULATION @ ORTUZAR IN NEW YORK

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*text by Emma Grimes*



Installation images: Installation views, *Kurt Kauper: Housekeeping*, Ortuzar, New York, January 15 – February 28, 2026

Kurt Kauper's current exhibition, *Housekeeping*, at Ortuzar Gallery presents just over a dozen new paintings. His earlier work often references classic portrait conventions and borrows from recognizable stereotypes (such as film stars and athletes), and in *Housekeeping*, the subjects remain identifiable while resisting easy legibility.

Kauper steers in a slightly different direction here, presenting a few still lifes and scenes set in unusual circumstances. In *Fantasy #1*, a nude man floats horizontally beside what appears to be a bus stop and parking lot. The lower half of the man's body merges into a cloud, and no other part of the canvas acknowledges that strangeness.



Kurt Kauper  
Fantasy #1, 2019  
Oil on Birch Panel  
45 x 58 inches (114.3 x 147.3 cm)

In the same room, a pair of still lifes are painted on round canvases, recalling Renaissance *tondos*, a format that was usually used for devotional, Biblical scenes. *Objects Carefully Organized in front of the Curtains, on the Credenza* contains a yellow pyramid, a grey vase with flowers, a comb sitting inside a water glass, and a precise cut of salmon on a blue plate. Nearby, in another *tondo*, a window-cleaning bottle is posed on a marble countertop before satin green curtains.

The following room is primarily devoted to Kauper's *Watching Men* series. Though Kauper has been known for painting nude bodies (mainly men, some women), here he narrows the focus on male faces caught in their intimate rituals: combing hair, brushing teeth, shaving. Each man is depicted in portrait, gazing out past the right edge of the canvas towards an implied mirror.



Kurt Kauper

*Objects Carefully Organized in front of the Curtains, on the Credenza, 2025*

Oil on Dibond

28 x 25 inches (71.1 x 63.5 cm)



Kurt Kauper

*Watching Men #10*, 2024

Oil on Dibond

12 x 12 inches (30.5 x 30.5 cm)



Kurt Kauper  
*Watching Men #11*, 2024  
Oil on Dibond  
12 x 12 inches (30.5 x 30.5 cm)

In *Watching Men #10*, a young man holds a razor to his neck, gaze fixed on the reflection outside the bounds of the canvas. He wears a yellow v-neck sweater layered over a white button-down, and a red tie tucked loosely underneath. He looks like he could wander into a 1950s romantic comedy and no one would know the difference.

His skin, however, is strangely glossy. It's too smooth even, like the head of a plastic doll. The hyper-polished details direct attention towards the surface of the canvas and away from the content. His brushwork creates a sense of uncanniness, which in turn distances the viewer and the painting.

Kauper has been explicit about his dislike of explanatory or interpretative language being applied to his work, expressing interest in what he calls “the possibility of the non-linguistic.” In a lecture, he cited Viktor Shklovsky’s essay “Art as Technique” by way of explaining his view of art’s purpose. Shklovsky argues that art exists to “estrangle” (*ostranenie*) the familiar. By doing so, he thought art could interrupt our daily habits and “recover the sensation of life.” Kauper’s paintings seek to operate within this logic.

There are half a dozen paintings in the *Watching Men* series, each face similarly generic and neutral in expression. Their identities are interchangeable, and this anonymity, coupled with the overpolished surfaces, helps stimulate that feeling of estrangement.

In *Watching Men #15* and *Watching Men #11*, for example, both of the men have their hands extended above their heads, in the midst of fixing their hair. In *Watching Men #14*, a middle-aged, bald man brushes his teeth. Even in these scenes where one might expect a sense of movement, the paintings feel utterly immobile, hardened into place.

These are the faces of the kind of man that has been (and still is, really) defined as the default, but Kauper here presents them as copies of copies. They are simultaneously the archetype and a simulation. And their masculinity doesn’t emerge as a natural state, but instead as something rehearsed and repeated through particular details: poses, clothing, hairstyles.

These depictions of masculinity point to both the idealized image we have of it and the copies of the image—an incessant rehearsal of a role that was arguably always more fiction than fact. But even here, his work still resists total legibility. The details—a red tie, gelled hair, floral wallpaper—carry obvious cultural significance on their own, yet their familiarity does not result in a cohesive, stable understanding. It only produces opacity. In Kauper’s paintings, you can recognize everything and conclude next to nothing.

*Housekeeping* is on view through February 28 at [Ortuzar](#), 5 White Street, New York.