

## GARY RUDELL

*The Kiss*, 2016  
Oil on panel, 32 x 24 in



COURTESY DOLBY CHADWICK GALLERY

## HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

### The Kiss

**T**he first job Thanos Karras held when he was fourteen was handling the checkroom for events held in the community hall of their neighborhood Greek church. The job paid no salary, but since many guests left the affairs held in the hall visibly inebriated, their tips were generous.

These special events included birthday parties and anniversary celebrations, funeral luncheons and wedding dinners. As far as Thanos was concerned, the success of an event was measured by the number of empty wine and beer bottles stacked in cases outside the kitchen.

After a year, his monopoly on the checkroom ended when a church trustee complained that Thanos was too young to assume sole responsibility for the checkroom. Despite Thanos's protesting that he could handle the task, a nineteen-year-old named Byron Matsas (son of the trustee who had lodged the complaint) was assigned to join him. After Byron spent thirty minutes explaining to Thanos that since he was older, he should receive a greater percentage of the tips, Thanos took an instant dislike to Byron.

Not long after Byron joined him, a guest left a wedding drunk enough that when he retrieved his coat he couldn't distinguish between currency denominations and left a fifty-dollar-bill tip. He had put it into their tip box and Thanos didn't notice it until after the man was gone. Byron had been on a break (sitting behind the checkroom counter exhausted him, so he needed frequent breaks). After Byron returned, he confiscated the bill while reassuring Thanos, "I'll find the rightful owner and make sure he gets it back."

For months afterward, Thanos asked Byron if he had located the owner of the bill. "I'm working on it," Byron would say. After about a year, realizing that Byron hadn't any intention of finding the bill's owner, Thanos stopped asking. That episode became one more reason for his mistrust of Byron.

Late at night, after the bride and groom had departed, with the wedding celebration in its final stages, there were always a few celebrants unwilling to stop dancing and drinking. They could not close the checkroom until the last coat had been picked up.

Byron would often leave Thanos to close up, reassuring him the only reason he was departing early was to allow