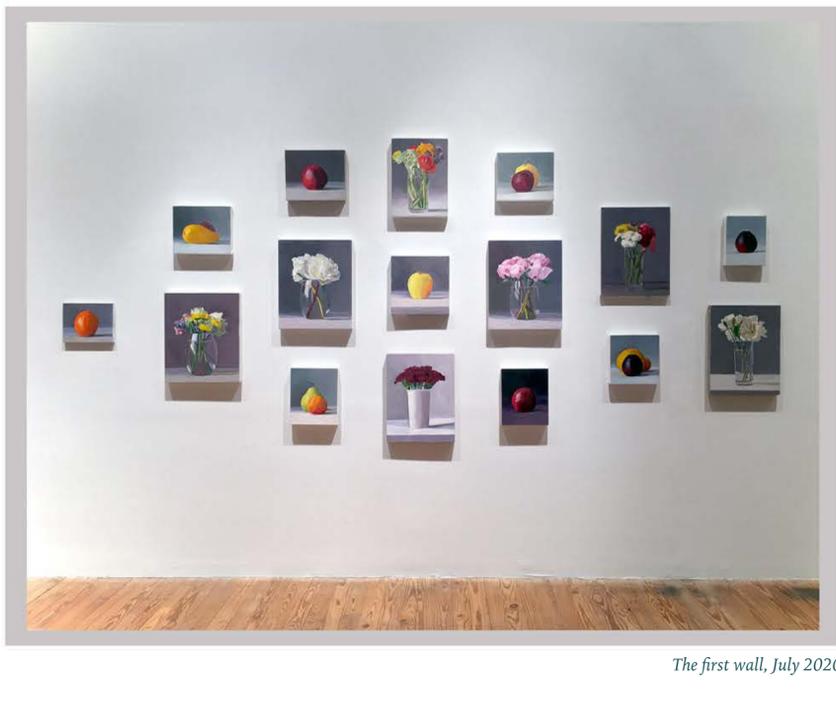


TEXAS GALLERY



The first wall, July 2020

DAN McCLEARY

The Living Wall

July - September 2020



Still Life in Quarantine

I usually work on small still life paintings between working on larger figurative works. For the past year however, I've been focused on paintings of fruit and flowers. I paint them from life.

My studio is on a busy street next to MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. Since the shutdown, there is a palpable silence in our usually loud and chaotic neighborhood. In the solitude that accompanies this period of Coronavirus and quarantine, it feels appropriate to be alone in the studio with the still lifes.



Pink Lisianthus, 8.12.20, Oil on canvas, 18 1/4 x 14 3/4"



Pear & Apricot 5.29.20, Oil on canvas, 11 1/2 x 9 1/2"

I keep regular hours - 10am to 6:30 pm. Each painting takes about two days to complete. I take almost an hour to set up the fruit or arrange the flowers. I will move the fruit back and forth making sure it all looks interesting and right. Moving a plum a fraction of an inch to the left or right becomes a monumental decision. When I am working, I spend as much time staring at what is in front of me as I do laying down on canvas the phenomena that I observe.

Fruit does not change much in the time required to work on it. An apple remains static. I am allowed to focus on what I see happening in the shapes, colors and shadows on the set up before me.

Working on the flower paintings is very different. The stems soften, the petals drop. Unlike the fruit, the flowers are continuously moving. I am less in control.

I am now painting peonies. I chose them for no other reason than that they are in season. I am stunned by how much they change throughout the day. They are so delicate and feel slightly out of place in my messy studio.



Fig, 8.13.20, Oil on canvas, 9 3/4 x 8 3/4"



Mixed Flowers with Purple Tulip, 8.20.20, Oil on canvas, 18 1/2 x 15 1/2"

The space around the objects is as important as the objects themselves. The backgrounds become darker where they meet the light part of the flowers or fruit.

The more I look, the more I see. I become aware of subtle shifts in the color of the wall, table and the subjects themselves. I move in closer at the end of the day and see more details. Light in L.A. is fairly consistent, unchanging throughout the day. Shadows become richer in the late afternoon. Because I work in northern light these shadows never change their direction.

With both the fruit and flower paintings, my palette consists of pure color; warm and cool yellow, red, and blue. I also use white. Mixing these limited colors allows me to get close to the color I see.

Looking at something for many hours is very different from taking a picture. The photograph is a second's worth of information. Paintings of the fruit and flowers are also about the passage of time.



Wall in progress, August 2020

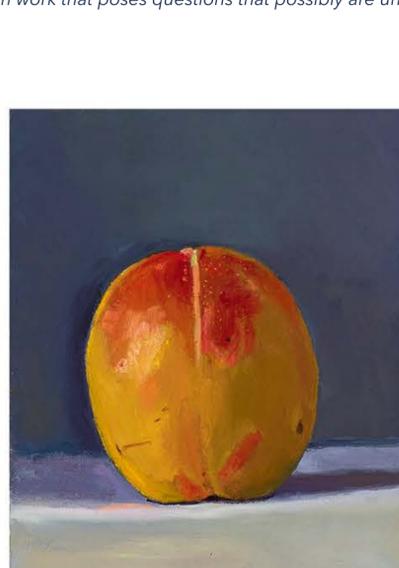
I am working much faster than usual during this cloistered period. Each painting tells a small drama of a group of living forms, usually followed by a painting in reaction to the story that preceded it.

When I take a break during my workday, I look at images by other artists. I spend a lot of time now poring over a book about the British artist, Euan Uglow. He is known for his paintings of the nude figure, but these days I am interested in his still lifes. They are done from hours of observation and have a presence that has nothing to do with photography.

I have a print of a still life by Cézanne on my wall. In the center is a group of apples. I am bewildered by its complete lack of conventional order. What the artist was after eludes me. A true understanding of his work feels unattainable. What he was thinking and doing while making this painting? Why does he leave areas unfinished? Why does the wall radically shift color? I have the same questions looking at Euan Uglow's work. I find myself most interested in work that poses questions that possibly are unanswerable.



Peonies & Yellow Tulip, 8.6.20, Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 14 3/4"

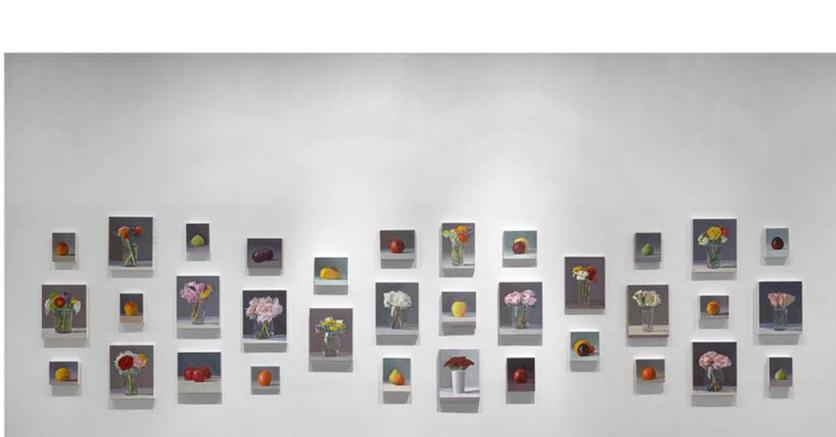


Yellow & Red Plum #3, 8.29.20, Oil on canvas, 10 x 8"

While pausing during my days in isolation, I also check the news. It is as if I am alone in a spaceship reading about what is happening on planet earth. I also mindlessly watch videos. I think I have seen every video Madonna appeared in, a great distraction from my work. After 10 minutes of this I am ready to return to painting.

My day can consist of staring at a plum on a piece of grey paper for eight hours. This activity is completely engrossing and wordless. The more concentration it takes, the more difficult it is to return to the other activities of the day. After leaving the studio, I struggle to engage in conversation. This sense of wordlessness is intensified by quarantine. Social interactions are accompanied by a negotiation of safety and caution and degree of tentativeness always seems to be present. I used to take for granted the ability to observe people in an unconscious and relaxed manner. The masks make it impossible to see people's full facial expressions. I forget that everyone I know in other cities in the U.S. are also wearing masks, not just in L.A.

I know I will one day return to working from the figure. I look forward to the pleasure of drawing and painting people from life; I have no idea now what this work will look like or when that will be. For now, in this time of social distancing, I am content to spend my time working on these still lifes. It feels right to focus on things that are so alive and silent. - Dan McCleary



The final wall, September 2020

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