

English



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• exposition / exhibition
JEU-JEN / THU-FRI 14h-18h30
SAM / SAT 11h-17h

• bureaux / offices
LUN-JEN / MON-FRI 9h-12h30
14h-18h30

Works from 1992 to 2004

Exhibition in collaboration with
Anton Kern Gallery New York

Vernissage / Opening
quARTier des Bains
Jeudi / Thursday 16_09_04 18h-21h

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Dan McCarthy: The Silver Surfer

"There is no planet more blessed than this, no world more lavishly endowed with natural beauty...with gentle climate...every ingredient to create a virtual living paradise, posses of rainfall in great abundance...soil fertile enough to feed an entire galaxy, with a sun ever warm, ever constant ever symbolizing new life and new hope. This tiny blessed sphere which men call Earth"
from The Silver Surfer no. 1, 1968 © Marvel Comics.

Alison M. Gingeras: Surfers, skateboarders, girls in bikinis, ocean landscapes, mountainous backdrops, various tropical fish, exotic flora and fauna—these reoccurring tropes seem to recall your birthplace, Honolulu, as well as the formative years you spent in Southern California. There is a strong temptation to read the subjects depicted in your paintings through your biography. Are these reoccurring figures and settings based on your lived experiences? Are they fantastic archetypes, sprung from your imagination? Or is your imagery a hybrid of experience and invention?

Dan McCarthy: My family moved from Hawaii to Huntington Beach California in 1963, when I was a little over one year old, so southern California would be the base of my memory bank.

The paintings are a combination of lived experiences and imaginary archetypes. Huntington Beach of the 1970s is different from today in that there were less people and less development. Yet at the same time, looking out at the beach and the Pacific Ocean, it is as if time was turned back to centuries ago. The natural aspect of the sea has not visible changed while the social aspect has changed dramatically. In my paintings, I attempt to bridge this temporal dichotomy rather than focus on the past or comment on the current social environment.

AMG: Yet there is no feeling of nostalgia in your paintings even if you draw on your past? The scenes you paint seem to be suspended in time.

DMC: Nostalgia is one of the worst pitfalls for a painter; it's a crutch that does not support the weight. So I steer clear of any shortcuts or hooks like that...

In terms of how my work is positioned in "time", the paintings say this is how it was, is and will be...

AMG: Your iconography operates like an open system—figures, colors, themes, characters, and actions repeatedly manifest themselves from canvas to canvas, yet each repetition actually reveals a subtle permutation. There is crypto-religious undercurrent that is often perceived in your works—where a bikini clad girl rides across the horizon line on a skateboard with her arms outstretched as if a

female Christ; rainbow-hued halos often encircle your beach-going protagonists; birds and fish seem to echo the symbolism of Biblical tales. While the viewer is able to access your "system" or cosmology, I have the impression that you are generating a self-sustaining universe that actually relates to your personal worldview? Is there a special key to understanding the meaning of your iconography?

DMC: The painting would be the manifestation of a self-sustaining universe. I believe that Gautama Buddha is the most important person ever and the cognition that he proposed is in the end nonverbal. Its expression in our life can be a circuitous dialectic and at the same time we all know the difference between light and dark or hot and cold. I would like to think that we all have the key to our own self-sustaining universe.

The key to most paintings is an open mind, patient observation, and a willingness to accept something new. My paintings are like that. Yet if there is key need to unlock this for the viewer, I am not doing my job as a painter.

AMG: While certain themes remain constant in your work, the weather is often changing. Different metrological phenomena seem to provide you with a narrative ploy for pictorial and color experimentations. Snow, sunlight, rainbows, and oceanic cloud formations—all of these atmospheric conditions allow for you to use painterly glazes that oscillate between transparency and opacity, to employ an idiosyncratic color palette, to create distinctive textures with a brush or other surface effects. Is weather just an excuse for formal play?

DMC: As with most historical forms of personal expression, a refinement or model exists. However this model is constantly changing through development and experimentation of the form—moving in and out of this is a painter's practice. I want to describe as accurately as possible the season, time of day, and temperature in a painting. Obviously, in some paintings there are some exceptional days, metrologically speaking.

AMG: To continue speaking about historical forms, your work often neatly falls into the genre of landscape. I was wondering if they could be allied with a specific category within this genre, namely the Romantic notion of the 'pathetic fallacy'—an idea that came from John Ruskin, where the attribution of human emotions or characteristics are transferred onto to inanimate objects or to nature?

DMC: Pathetic fallacy seems like a strong and overtly informative description for linking human emotions to the natural world. If we engage the circuitous dialectic as proposed by Guatama Buddha, there might be less

distortion than need be. After all, attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects is an interesting although not necessarily a Romantic proposition.

An empty coffee cup may appear to be inanimate but it was designed a constructed with some degree of thought and care. Compassion, if you will. Filled with coffee, it becomes part of a ritual and nourishment of sorts, part of one's life. Paintings can be likened to this description as well.

AMG: Your human subjects—figures that can tend towards clown-ish buffoon-like characters with exaggerated red noses or disembodied facial expressions—confirms to me that you choose to eschew the burden of realism in favor of a more individualistic vein of figuration. In the same way, your overall compositions reject illusionistic space in favor of a dominating sense of flatness. Where does this flatness come from? I was thinking a lot about the influence of the radical two dimensionality of Japanese Art.

DMC: Japanese Ukiyo-e prints by Hiroshige and Hokusai have made an impact on many levels. The apparent economy of means behind a rigorous and labor-intensive system to achieve an implied illusionistic depth with mostly primary colors is obviously a starting point. And their influence goes on from there. Van Gogh is an obvious choice, but it is too literal for me. Edvard Munch seemed to get a great deal more. He took Japanese art and really ran with what he saw; he added an emotional depth that the Japanese artists of that period felt was unnecessary. Munch's paintings are so flat that when viewed from the side there is little or no texture whatsoever. I would imagine that both Munch and Hokusai felt that building up a surface with material, either real or implied, was unnecessary. It was something to be avoided as it detracted from the immediacy of the subject, an unnecessary barrier that made the experience of both painting and viewing illegitimate. I am interested in artist who take a position that says "this is who I am and this is how I feel about the world, let me take a chance and describe it for you."

AMG: Your work stakes this position is through your development of an idiosyncratic, deeply subjective language. In both in terms of content execution, your work stands out as a completely distinctive position in the current flood of figurative painting. It has certainly deviated from the scores of painters who work from photographs.

DMC: For me, the artist's position is critical. To simply take a photograph and put it in a project and fill-in the colors is an unnecessary crutch, a brain dead option. Richter is a prime example of this school; he takes a subject to political radicals operating in a cautious social climate,

and tells you absolutely nothing about his position or feelings about the subject. He simply renders it in a photographically realistic manner and walks away from an object ripe with empty sensationalism; just another enlarged newspaper clipping rendered in oil, dripping with empty nostalgia. I feel that painting as so many more options and possibilities than photography. Painting's ability to convey multiple viewpoints is one of those possibilities.

AMG: Your work was recently featured in an exhibition entitled "Unplugged" in Italy—the show characterized you as working on the "fringe" like a "current day Gauguin working in Tahiti." Having been to your studio in New York, I thought this reading was a bit of a stretch. The art world always needs the romanticism and myth of outsiders. While your imagery and even technique sometimes flirt with an outsider or quirky aesthetic, your practice is far from an outsider or faux-naïve stance.

DMC: Gauguin had a very difficult time of it in Tahiti: cut off from his wife and children; he had crushing debts and poor physical and mental health as well as numerous unresolved political and social problems with the Tahitians. Gauguin arrived in Tahiti one hundred years too late.

I suppose that curators need to describe what they think and make a quick sound bite for a public with a limited attention span. Sort of meeting the artist and going to the studio, they need to ad lib, its part of their job, I don't take it too literally.

The art world always seems to be looking for a leader of the pack; it's an aesthetic, economic and social situation. I hope my work transcends this need to pigeonhole artists into digestible categories. Looking at the history of painting, all of the most important contributions were made by so called outsiders who were then integrated into the mainstream by other artists and eventually art critics. Nor am I interested in creating naïve paintings, or aligning myself with an outside the mainstream position to attract attention on a stylistic platform.

When I graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1984, our major areas of focus were: rolling a joint, scoring killer Humboldt, and organic mushrooms from Santa Cruz. We were taught to turn out like good bohemians. When in came to learning to paint, the school's motto was "pushing paint"—a notion that covered a wide area without emphasis on technique. I attempt to make paintings as directly and unfiltered as possible. I start by drawing directly on the canvas to set up the composition and then adding color. As color has compositional qualities of its own, this often changes the layout. After a series of corrections and adjustments, I arrive at a finished painting. In the end, it's a completely intuitive process.