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Leslie Vreeland, "'A Perfect Rhythm: Landscapes and Still Lifes,'" *Telluride Daily Planet*, February 16, 2021.

TELLURIDE DAILY PLANET

'A Perfect Rhythm: Landscapes and Still Lifes'

Artists behind Telluride Gallery's new exhibit discuss their work Thursday

By Leslie Vreeland, Contributing Editor | Feb 16, 2021



"Two Plums" (2020), a still life by Dan McCleary, on exhibit at the Telluride Gallery of Fine Art. (Courtesy photo)

In uncertain times, where do you find perfect rhythm?

One way might be to take solace in nature.

Which is not to say that the Telluride Gallery of Fine Art's new exhibit, "A Perfect Rhythm" — landscapes and still lifes that, by definition, are a step removed from humans, and the business (and busyness) of living — is devoid of drama.

Andy Woll, whose work is on display here, grew up in Venice Beach (like all four artists in this exhibit, he calls Southern California home).

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During drives down Venice Boulevard, headed to Downtown L.A., Woll was compelled by the same thing that so many of us are in the San Juans: craggy peaks jutting upward, “summits and crests, hazy and dramatic in the distance beyond the skyline. One of those peaks,” Mount Wilson, became the main subject of Woll’s practice — “a sort of tangle between abstraction and Angeleno landscape,” as Maxwell Williams put it in “Peak Performance,” a survey of Woll’s works (“Los Angeles-based artist Andy Woll’s in-demand mountain range paintings are driving his studio in one direction: up”).

Woll’s depiction of the Southland’s emblematic mountain in the Telluride Gallery is, in this way, a little like Wilson Peak, the iconic 14,000-footer outside town, as seen in winter: an austere, forbidding pyramid against a gray sky.

Christine Nguyen, who grew up in L.A. and divides her time between Denver and Long Beach, and whose works also hang here, fixates on nature differently. Her cyanotypes, which combine photographic techniques and drawings, fuse elements of water and sky into “a dreamlike world where oceans merge with outer space,” as a solo exhibit of her work, titled “The Cosmos and the Sea,” described her works.

Lucas Reiner, meanwhile, whose paintings hang in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (as well as in downtown Telluride), concerns himself with nature as cultivated by people: trees lining city streets, singular characters in a hazy/smoggy world, depicted with the same care a portrait painter might pay to human subjects. The “roots” of the human world, you might say, are part of Reiner’s artistic philosophy

“A painting is an object of culture that attempts to replicate the processes of nature,” he has said.

And artist Dan McCleary, whose works also hang here, are a personal response to the strangeness of the past 12 months. After “spending the last year in the solitude and unusual quiet of his Los Angeles studio, he has shifted his focus to set-ups of fruit and flower imagery, which he paints from life,” as a news release for “Perfect Rhythm” puts it.

Another place you might discover perfect rhythm is via a steady heartbeat or, perhaps (in the context here), art from the heart — art-inspired generosity — which explains the second part of this exhibit. Titled “New Prints from Art Division,” on view through March 13, the show depicts works from a nonprofit dear to McCleary: he founded Art Division, in the predominantly Latino neighborhood surrounding MacArthur Park, in 2010 as a way of “building and maintaining a thriving arts community” in a place notorious for gang violence and urban mayhem. McCleary’s aim: to offer “professional arts training and academic and career support” to young adults in this underserved area.

Every picture tells a story in this exhibit, and many stories — about how Cleary came to found Art Division, for example — remain untold. One thing is for certain: “Creating these works gave the artists a peaceful reprieve,” the Telluride Gallery’s news release says. How does an artist achieve peace and the inner space to create in a fraught time? Learn more Thursday, when Woll, Nguyen, Reiner and McCleary come together to discuss their works, and inspirations, via Zoom, beginning at 6 p.m. Visit telluridegallery.com to register and learn more.