

DAN MCCLEARY  
*STILL LIFES*

Exhibition: From September 7 to October 12, 2023

Inauguration: Thursday, September 7, 2023, from 4:00PM to 8:00PM with the artist in attendance



Dan McCleary, *Pear, Apple and Plum*, 2023  
Oil on canvas  
30.5x38.1cm

*Dan McCleary: Still life as a death meditation*

### Natural things

Naming the artistic practice of painting fruit, flowers, animals, and inanimate objects without any living human presence, remains a semantic conundrum. The French term "nature morte" (literally, "dead nature") first appeared at the end of the 17th century but was preceded by the Italian "cose naturali" ("natural things"), as used by the Tuscan artist and writer Giorgio Vasari to refer to the paintings of Giovanni da Udine. In 1650, the Flemish came up with the word "stilleven", meaning "dining piece". It was then taken up by German artists and writers as "stilleben", which eventually led to the English term "still life". If the first confirmed use of the French "nature morte" goes back to 1736, Diderot, for his part, used the expression "natures inanimées", or ("inanimate nature"). The difference between the English and French terms reflects a certain perspective, and a particular philosophy. Is nature dead? Or is life staying still?

### Sweet solitude

This aesthetic ambivalence mirrors Dan McCleary's own creative process. Indeed, McCleary began his artistic journey mostly painting the human figure. Similar to David Hockney, Patrick Proktor or Peter Blake, Dan McCleary would paint the faces and bodies that surround him, whether of friends or encounters. But in 2020, the global pandemic hit, and forced him, like the rest of us, to isolate himself and avoid human contact. McCleary had always practiced still life to some degree, but at this point, the genre became a daily exercise for him. And every day spent in isolation and stillness, on the brink of death, was a day spent painting fruit and flowers, still on life's side. As the artist points out: "However, I have come to relish the solitude of working on the still life paintings." A sweet solitude, away from the world and its hardships, where we reach within ourselves to find ourselves. Fruit and flowers are a reflection of the artist's

inner peace. In McCleary's paintings, we find the same meditative principle of one the greatest artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Giorgio Morandi. While Morandi completely excluded life from his work (painting mostly jars and bottles), life is at the very heart of McCleary's painting: the beauty of a daffodil, a bouquet of narcissus or lilac, or the more minimal beauty of an apricot, a pear or two mangoes, in works reminiscent of the timeless obsessions of Cézanne and of Édouard Manet's last floral paintings.

"Repetition is a form of change."

Through repetition, the artist also finds his rhythm, his breathing. Repetition becomes proof of life. As Brian Eno and his friend Peter Schmidt wrote on one of the cards of their *Oblique Strategies* (1975), "repetition is a form of change". The successive paintings feel similar, but each one is inevitably different from the others. "Same same, but different", as the Thai say, meaning that there are always "subtle nuances" between two apparently similar things. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that repetition in Dan McCleary's art is the antithesis of the mechanical, industrial repetitions of Warhol. In McCleary's work, there is no exhaustion or erasure of the subject. Repetition here is the result of manual work, of a daily attempt to embrace reality through the brush and paint. As visitors take a closer look at the paintings, they slowly penetrate the material, experience the gesture, and, through this process, enter a form of abstraction within figuration. This intention and gesture impart a contemporary quality to his art. According to artist Jack Pierson, a long-time friend of McCleary's, "Dan's humility and discipline are beautifully echoed in his masterful paintings and prints. I've long been a passionate admirer of his work and personality." And indeed, McCleary's works recall the radicalism and sincerity of an artist like On Kawara, painting a new canvas every day, as a testament to his own existence. However, Dan McCleary's testament is also an attempt to share the absolute beauty of the world.

Yan Céh.

His work resides in collections of public and private institutions such as the Hammer Museum, the Harvard Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the New York Public Library, among others.

Dan Mc Cleary was born in 1952. He lives and works in Los Angeles.