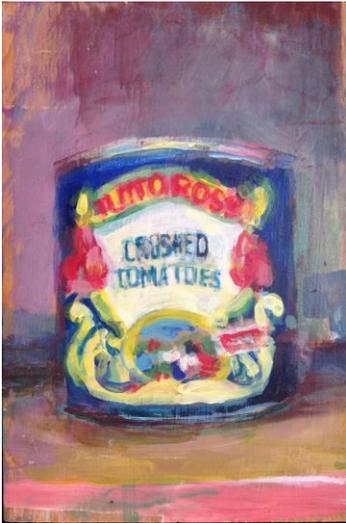


*Observations - paintings by Maura Doern Danko at Gallery on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Lawrenceville Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania [www.galleryon43rdstreet.com](http://www.galleryon43rdstreet.com)*

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*Crushed Tomatoes, acrylic on panel*

*The following questions were posed by Juliana Netschert, via e-mail correspondence. Juliana is a landscape painter. Both Juliana and Maura studied at the American University in the 1980's, and worked at The Phillips Collection. They've shared a long friendship.*

- 1. Obviously, painting is not dead for you as the theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would have led us to believe. You relish brushstroke, color and recognizable subjects.**

**Is total abstraction an issue for you? How important is the tradition of figurative painting?**

It seems that this whole endeavor is about abstraction; making things with parts - organizing the parts. Lately I've been thinking more about problem-solving, and the analogies in painting about this topic. It seems that each moment in painting can be solved in a myriad of ways. I guess the decision-making is the key. You have to let some things go, even though they may have been important to me at an earlier time, and perhaps they may be again in the future. So it seems that it's all within the bailiwick of abstraction. Even if it is about the basic stuff: line, shape, value... all abstractions.

I am very connected to the image – the recognizable object. And yes, the tradition of figurative painting is very valuable to me. I continually mine art history. For instance, I

can go back to Rembrandt and look at all sorts of things: gesture, compositional unity, expressive subject matter, interaction with the viewer, and then back again. Lately I am looking at Velazquez. And always Goya. I am painting a lot of still life now, and for some reason I think Goya's still life of Three Salmon Steaks may have started it all.

There is something about the visceral, as well as the allegorical. The language of paint just can't be supplanted by other mediums, other technologies. A human hand makes a mark, responds to material and connects to seeing (whether painting from direct observation or not, as one paints, one sees in space). All of this responsiveness has a language in perception – for the viewer, not just the painter. It's ineffectively describable in words, but carries so much with it in the seeing.

**2. Your source seems to be working from both direct observation and from photographs. How do these two methods differ and coalesce in your work?**

Some of the work is from photographic resources – specifically, old family albums that my mother put together. My mother always had a camera with her. I have done a lot with these, particularly after my daughter was born. Because of the nature of the original source, they act as reverential items, not just reference.

Although I continue to use a variety of photographic resources for imagery, the past six months I have been steadily looking at that which is in front of me. Photographs fundamentally abbreviate space and light, but there are other things to explore. The images can be a cue for a series of other associations.

When you're working from life, there is this vast experiential thing that comes up – in this work I have found scale to be an issue and a sort of perceptual shift expressing a kind of relativity. These issues wouldn't have come up so immediately had I not been working from life.

I like pursuing a range of influences and directions – some take you down interesting tracks – and it all seems to inform one another.



*Red Flowers and Bee, gouache*

**3. Interiors seem to be very important. There is a sense of intimacy and familiarity, of family and the everyday. Describe how the object paintings, triptychs, and scenes interact – what do they mean?**

I've always been interested in these themes. And I've spent a lot of time examining the work of artists that treat these themes: Bonnard, Vuillard. There's something so euphoric and simultaneously complicated in Bonnard's interiors.

In the past I've explored different formats, and at some point I was exploring ways of expressing ideas with a split canvas. Separately, I started to examine pattern. Some of it was very personal, using specific swatches for projects. I like using the patterns to create a sense of something, but I also enjoy pushing around space with them (looking around them, using it as a catalyst to push distance).

The small painted objects in the triptychs are almost entirely from a book I found in the library on the pin collection of Madeleine Albright. I had been just off a six month period of making big paintings about women. My using them as images aren't tied to her so specifically, as using them as decorative constructions.

The triptychs are foldable, and I had refrained from framing them for a long time. They function to me like prayer-cards. The various images throughout promote loose associations. They offer ideas about the gaze. We might see into the scenes from snapshots with a sense of nostalgia, even if it is a group of figures you don't know. You might look at the object of jewelry...gaze around the pattern.

**4. You draw with brushstrokes. What are you looking for?**

Considering we used to work together so long ago at The Phillips Collection, I immediately think of its influence. There are so many painters that I spent time getting to know in that collection. Daumier comes to mind, as I think about the role of brushstroke. Looking at Daumier taught me to approach the form sculpturally, with the brushstroke. I

think of the haptic experience – to touch the surface of what you’re seeing, and re-seeing, with the accumulation of strokes that identify form and space. Couple that with pigment, and you have such a rich sense of things seen. And experienced.

**5. Your brushstrokes also create broken color while still maintaining a sense of local color, directional light and separation of shapes from the space around. Your color is also expressive but does not exaggerate. What does color mean to you?**

Color names things. It can identify parts of an object, but it can also function as an agent of positioning space.

I work with a pretty basic palette which is always slightly shifting. I work with about seven to ten pigments usually. I love mixing opposites and stretching the results to find a range of values and make space accordingly. I’ve been especially interested in making grays. Catherine Goodman, and John Dubrow are two artists I’ve looked at with great admiration for their grays.

The work in this show is mostly acrylic; some are gouache. I’ve brought alizarin crimson back into my palette and finding a range of dark grays with it, and cerulean blue that can really stretch.

**6. Is the difference between your media important – whether paper, panel or canvas?**

Some of the decisions are practical. My working space is really small right now. I like the feel of the brush on certain kind of surfaces more than others. At this point I am favoring the wooden panel – it can provide a beautiful tone from which to work, almost like a ground of an underpainting, but more subtle because of the natural fiber and its sense of light. Instead of prepping it with gesso, I simply size it with a clear adhesive. It’s not particularly fine wood – pine in most cases; the material has such a luminosity. And even with acrylic, there is an amazing glazing that can occur because of the nature of how the wood responds to the paint. And paper is really transportable – and often I carry things around while I am making them.

*The exhibition is on view April 25 – June 6, 2014*

*Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday 11:00- 6:00*

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