



Fine Art Today Artist Profile

Insight, Revelation, and Discovery

By Andrew Webster - February 9, 2017

Often it is a pure and humble approach to the blank canvas that leads to aesthetic success. When artists divert from the formulaic and allow creativity to flow organically, the untainted core of art often emerges: to express that which words cannot.

Artist Nancy Depew is a case in point, and her process allows the painter to respond naturally to a piece as it's revealed, leading to moments of insight, revelation, and discovery. "It's an adventure filled with perils and surprises," she says of her creative process. "I try to respond to the artwork as it forms, choosing options that will lead me to learning the most I can from and about the work." For Depew, painting affords ample opportunity to journey inward and investigate her responses to the "thousands of options you have every time you pick up a brush," as she suggests.



Nancy Depew, "Afterthought," oil on canvas, 40 x 26 in. (c) Nancy Depew 2017

Although Depew avoids any strict methodology when a painting begins, her results are undeniably masterful in their naturalism and magnetic in their quiet simplicity. With little idea of what the finished painting may look like, Depew often builds her work from “a visual idea, gesture, or intuitive idea, not a verbal or rational one.” She says, “I am not attempting to capture reality. If you want to convey a story, chances are you would try to do it with words. Our society revolves around verbal communication, but a huge part of our day-to-day experience is visual and has little to do with words or logical thought. Words get layered on top of experience. When I paint, I try to forget about words.”



Nancy Depew, “*Better Now*,” oil on canvas, 60 x 40 in. (c) Nancy Depew 2017



Nancy Depew, "*Insight*," oil on canvas, 36 x 26 in. (c) Nancy Depew 2017



Nancy Depew, "*Merge*," oil on canvas, 40 x 60 in. (c) Nancy Depew 2017

“Insight” is a fascinating example of this process. Set against a dark background populated with a number of stunning, flowing lilies, a nude female figure is shown in half-length at the left edge of the canvas. Lit from above, the subject brings her arms to one shoulder, crossing her forearms and embracing herself. With eyes closed, her elevated — and inward — gaze is hopeful and uplifting. Describing the process, Depew writes, “I went into the session with no clear idea of what pose I was looking for. I went in looking and found something, or the pose found me; it was serendipity, a discovery. Although it wasn’t clear, I knew it was there and had to develop it. First I realized it was going to be a portrait. I had been working on a series of paintings of flowers combined with figures so I thought about what it might be like to include flowers. I had to choose the flowers, and each one had to be placed and orchestrated, each moment determined, how loud, how soft, how dark, how light. The painting revealed itself one bit at a time. I was fortunate and the piece went together easily. This isn’t always the case. I often have to stop and rework the images. Sometimes I have to set them aside for weeks or months before I can see how to proceed.”



Nancy Depew, “*Weight*,” oil on canvas, 36 x 55 in. (c) Nancy Depew 2017

Although Depew does not recognize a specific agenda for her paintings, she does hope to entice and “encourage the viewer to have his or her own experience. She says, “I hope I’m presenting food for thought, for contemplation that may lead to something of significance or discovery for the viewer.” After 40 years of painting, Depew acknowledges that she’s made mistakes along the way, but she’s come far and learned so much. The artist seems more motivated than ever to push herself artistically and appreciate the creative moments in the studio. She adds, “I hope I have many more years of painting. Every day is a gift. I try very hard to treat it that way. There are thousands of paintings I would like to make but I have no clear vision of the work I intend to complete. I do, however, have a clear sense that the days are slipping away and I want to make to best work I can in the time I have left.”

To learn more, visit [Nancy Depew](#).

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