

Just Beneath the Surface

Artist Statement

As a still life painter, I'm amazed at how one unconsciously ends up projecting pieces of one's self or what is currently stirring in the depths of one's existence onto the set-up. For example, with several of the paintings in my show "Just Beneath the Surface," the choice to use Guernica as a background was not an analytical choice but an emotional one, and says something about the level of anxiety and lack of certainty I feel in the times in which we live. I didn't go out of my way to narrate a response to the chaos and political upheaval, and yet, there it is in some of the work, especially the pieces titled Under Surveillance and Bearing Witness.

As a teenager, my favorite artists were the surrealists who were known for their explorations of the subconscious mind and use of dreamlike and symbolic imagery. I think some of that early influence has crept into my work. Although my work appears staged, it isn't planned ahead of time. I don't start out by saying, well, I'm going to make a painting about this or that, or I'm going to explore this or that in a painting. I just put a bunch of stuff on the table, move them around and get interested in shadows, shapes, textures and the spatial relationships between objects. I arrange and rearrange until something looks and feels right. The compositions are driven by unconscious impulses and desire. Any perceived content in my work, lies beneath the surface. I'm always wanting to allow for something else to appear, something intangible and mysterious. That element of surprise is what makes the act of painting worthwhile.

The one thing that I was intentional about in creating this body of work was adding in more complexity. Much of my earlier still life work has been of one or two objects placed in the center of a vague, atmospheric space. This time I wanted to challenge myself with a series of paintings that contained more elements. In the process, I discovered something interesting about the contrast between a bold and active background and the still, fragile objects in the foreground.

I've been a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism for many years and as a Buddhist, I've learned that what brings me the greatest happiness is to focus my attention on creating value in this world. We learn as Buddhists to take our sufferings in and turn them into something positive, a process known as "turning poison into medicine". Like chanting or meditation, painting is a way for me to calm the storm within, and, hopefully, in the process I can add a moment of quiet contemplation and beauty to a harsh and tumultuous world.