

MICHAEL CARSON

Art Forms



In the lead-up to Michael Carson's upcoming show at Bonner David Galleries, we dropped by his Phoenix home to see his new work, and as he walked us up to a second-floor studio that overlooks his backyard and the Phoenix skyline, we had to shuffle through a thin layer of wood chips, the result of a recent tangent into wood carving, that were directly in front of his studio door.

Inside the studio were more surprises: a half-finished clay figure on a pedestal, designs for furniture, a small music corner—with drums, guitar, keyboard and recording equipment—and, as expected, an area dedicated to an easel and his paints. In every corner of his studio, even outside of it, Carson was devoting himself to the art of creation, in one form or another.

"I've been breaking up the painting with sculpting and wood carving. I enjoy experimenting with different surfaces, whether it's carving, making music, designing furniture. It's all a diversion that keeps the painting fresher," Carson says, adding that, although he's been working in many mediums, his new show will be exclusively paintings. "Right now with my painting I'm just trying to maintain the looseness and movement from the first half hour of painting. As soon as I get into the detail I get to a place where it's not as active. So I'm trying to evolve my style where I can maintain that initial freshness and gestural feel, as well as a sense of freedom and movement as well."

Carson, whose show opens December 21 at Bonner David Galleries in Scottsdale, Arizona, has been a fixture both locally in the Phoenix area, where he's lived for many years, and nationally for his loosely painted figures that seem to rise out of his raw, stripped-down paint. His paintings have a moodiness to them, and are evocative of another era—he hears callouts to 1960s New York and the 1930s—and yet they are mostly untethered by time and place.

"It's an unconscious thought for me, although I do get the 1930s sort of thing because of the faded quality to the color palette. It's like an old Polaroid, when the spectrum of darks and lights begin to fade.



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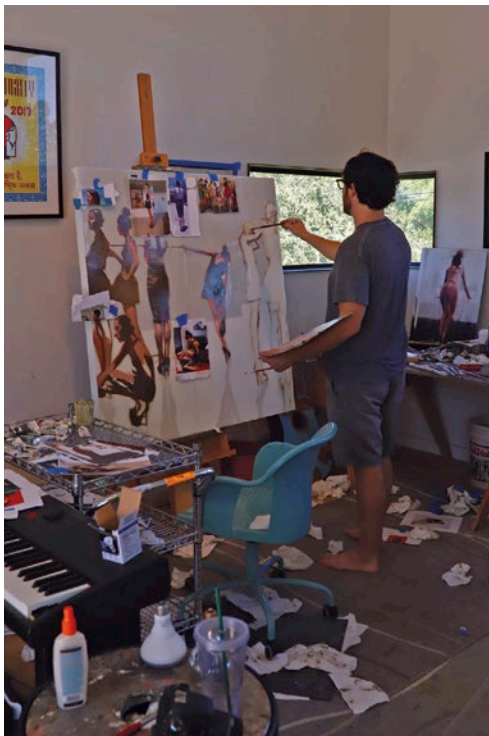
That's a quality of age," Carson says. "However people see my work is fine with me. There is no massive narrative to any of it. I'm really a people watcher. I want there to be subtle, if not minimal, expressions on the figures, which creates its own narrative possibilities."

New works in the show include a multi-figure painting, *When No Ones Looking*, and two female figures such as *Too Deep* and *Fleur du Mal V*, which is tinted a magnificent red that shifts to pink as it unspools down the figure's unfinished form, which is hallmark in Carson's work. "A lot of painters paint every aspect of the form with the exact amount of detail and that fails to draw me into a focal point. So, for me at least, I will turn my attention to a face or a pose and put the detail there, but let it be looser everywhere else. It's intentional," he says. "I jokingly say it makes painting easier, but it's also interesting to see how much detail I can get away with. I've learned that what I don't paint will be filled in by the viewer's brains. They finish it off."

Another thing Carson likes to stress is the gestural movement of a painter's arm as he or she pushes paint around. "The way your body moves, those are the mechanics that make the painting interesting," he adds. "It's like a thumbprint of your paint; it's the thing that makes your work unique." ●

Bonner David Galleries

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1
Fleur du Mal V,
oil on panel, 36 x 24"

2
*When No Ones
Looking*, oil and resin
on panel, 48 x 48"

3
Too Deep, oil on
panel, 30 x 20"

4
Michael Carson
paints in his Phoenix
studio.

