



JEFFREY VAUGHN

Earthy Gems

For painter Jeffrey Vaughn, it is all about nature, and more specifically, flowers. While the artist's past work focused more on landscape imagery, his one-man show at George Billis Gallery zooms in on florals of all kinds—spring blossoms on trees in particular. The show will feature nearly a dozen oil paintings of flowers in close-up view, illuminating Vaughn's specialty in side- and backlighting.

"Flowers in spring are the items in focus," Vaughn says of his new work, "and instead

of painting the entire tree of a dogwood, for example, the paintings are tightly cropped. The interplay of light and shadow is essential. Most of the paintings are an attempt to capture the light at a specific time when the sunlight is pouring through the leaves through the side or back, so you get shadows cast on branches. This creates an abstract pattern on the flowers as well."

Vaughn's exploration of nature through art began when he returned home to Illinois from Dallas after earning his

MFA in printmaking. "When I moved back, near St. Louis, I was struck with the natural beauty of the area, and the memories of when I grew up here," he explains. "There are just lots of beautiful flowering trees that had a familiarity. This is when I [initially] transitioned to landscape completely."

While Vaughn paints in what appears to be a highly realistic style, with subject matter taken from photographs, there is an organic transition that takes place in the



1
Backlit Rose, oil on panel,
18 x 18"

2
Flowering Dogwood, oil
on canvas, 36 x 60"

3
Morning Light, oil on
canvas, 40 x 60"

4
Roses in Warm Light, oil
on canvas, 24 x 24"



2



3



4

painting process. As seen in pieces like *Backlit Rose*, a fine example of Vaughn's favored lighting, there is a tendency for the artist to blur his backgrounds—an automatic response to allowing the flower to take center stage. When viewed from afar, the pieces appear highly photorealistic but up close, an abstract quality emerges. Vaughn notes that it's quite rare for him to depict single flowers in a centered format, but did so in *Backlit Rose* because it allows the viewer to get a deeper sense of the pattern of shadow and light.

In *Morning Light*, we get another rare sight, it being the first time the artist has

depicted a single flower. Again, we see the flower taking center stage, but “within the array of leaves, it adds complexity to the image,” says Vaughn. “I like the interaction with leaves, flower and water, and I use this interplay often.” Vaughn again shows his mastery of light, as it passes through the leaves to reveal their veiny intricacies.

More prominently on display in the show will be blossoms on trees, seen in pieces like *Flowering Dogwood*. We see Vaughn's use of out-of-focus backgrounds to bring into focus a close-up of a particular branch in all its springtime glory. “I try to work with the highlights in the foreground so

the flowers are brighter, giving a sense of emanating light,” he says.

When asked what he hopes viewers take away with them in the new body of work, he says, “it's a combination of nature and its beautiful forms and how they can be interpreted in a painting. It's all about the painting.”

The show will open January 12 with a reception from 5 to 8 p.m., and closes February 11. ●

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