

# Southwest Art



THE COLLECTOR'S CHOICE

for **40 YEARS**

**21** UNDER  
**31**

YOUNG  
ARTISTS  
TO COLLECT  
NOW

SEPTEMBER 2011





**Disappearing Youth, oil, 24 x 24.**

# Danny McCaw

## Taking chances in art matters

For the past three years, Danny McCaw has focused his artistic efforts on creating a body of work he calls the Lake Series. Old family photos have inspired these expressionistic depictions, which include children boating, swimming, and leaping into lakes. “I only use the photos as a jumping-off point,” McCaw says. “I want these paintings to be elusive and thought-provoking. I don’t want all the questions answered, but I want viewers to be enticed and engaged by what they are seeing.”

These days the Southern California painter says he works more from his drawings, imagination, and memory than he did when he first appeared in *Southwest Art* in 2003, in the annual “21 Under 31” article. Early in his career, McCaw believed a painting was finished when the scene or figure looked realistic or perfectly rendered. Now the likeness of the subject matter is secondary to him. “Art is more about the artist, not the subject that is depicted,” McCaw says. “Art is a voice to express ideas and how you feel about what’s happening in the world.”

**How has your style or approach to your art changed since your first appearance in *Southwest Art* in September 2003?** More than anything, my thinking has changed as to what art is and can be. I’m very open to all forms of art, no matter how different or shocking. It is so important to me to be open, to appreciate, and to understand the uniqueness of each

artist. It’s also important to me to look at many forms of art, take chances, and look at things in as many ways as possible if I want to advance my art into something I can call my own.

When I was younger I was enticed by artists who were skilled and more traditional. Now I look to the artists who take chances and who stray from the norm. I also look a lot at art history to see what movements and artists took chances to find their own voices.

My art and my processes have changed a lot. Now I work and rework a painting, scraping, sanding, and glazing it. I use different materials—anything it takes to make it my own. I love to be surprised. My paintings are now taking me longer because I’m starting to go over canvases that I have previously dismissed. I come back to them and try different things until they become something that I feel is right or I connect with. I look for accidents because of the opportunities they present.

### **How has your subject matter changed?**

My subject matter has both changed and stayed the same. I still like to paint cities and ballerinas, but now I’m looking through old family photos and candid stuff that wasn’t meant to be for my paintings. I like to challenge myself to make a painting from things that most people are not interested in. It makes it interesting not just for me but for viewers as well.

### **You share studio space with your father, Dan, and your brother, John. Do you critique each other’s work?**

Ours is a highly creative space. We are constantly talking about new ideas, other artists’ works, and movements in art history. We discuss theories, and we are constantly joking with and ribbing each other. We all work on different things. My brother does beautiful abstractions and wild figurative things that I love. My father has been working on these single figures that blow me away. We critique each other’s work every day, even if we don’t want to hear it. But a lot of times we just give each other encouragement to take our paintings further. We each see the other’s works with a fresh eye. I trust their opinions.

**Describe your studio.** The studio is crazy right now. It is 5,000 square feet, and there are three of us working in it. It used to be an old ballet studio, and it has hardwood floors throughout and exposed brick. We

## success stories

---

built large panels to hang our paintings on. There is stuff everywhere. Paintings are stacked against the walls and on the floor. You have to walk over paintings and boxes. It would drive most people mad, but it's such a creative space. If you were to come by our studio, you would know it's definitely a working studio.

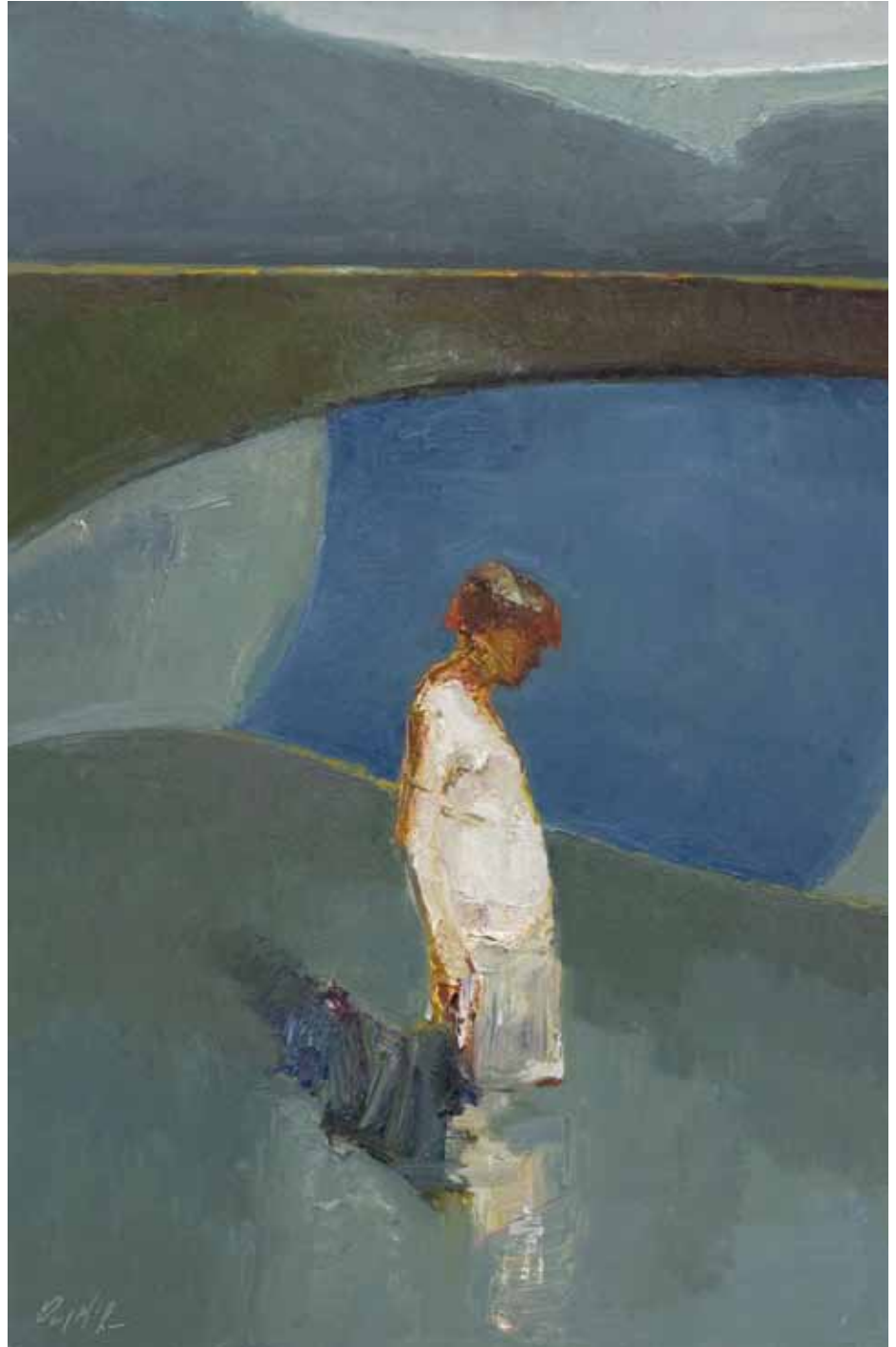
**What advice do you give to artists just starting out in their careers?** Learn the basics well. You can keep or disregard those basics later, but knowing them is just another tool we have when we can't figure out answers. Also, paint, draw, sculpt, write, and do installations. Do anything that stimulates you to create. Be open to new things. See shows and go to museums and art fairs. See what's going on around you. Even if you don't like the art you see, there is an energy there. You might meet other artists interested in the same things. Or you might get a great idea. Read as much as you can about art history. Find out who influenced whom and why. Everyone has been influenced by someone else. It's hard, lonely, and very selfish to be an artist, but it's in all of us to create. It's one of the most satisfying things when someone likes your work. And it can be one of the most debilitating things if someone doesn't like it. We as artists have to find the people who appreciate what we do. We have to stay stimulated enough to keep going.

**What is the biggest challenge of your fine art career?** My biggest challenge has been to change my thinking about what art is.

**What motto do you live by?** Drive it until the wheels fall off!

**What are you working on right now?** I have two shows coming up. One is in September at Gallery 1261 with my father and brother. The other one is at Anne Irwin Fine Art in October, also with my father and brother. We are working on doing a show at the studio if we can ever get it clean.

**What galleries represent you?** Trailside Galleries, Scottsdale, AZ, and Jackson, WY; Gallery 1261, Denver, CO; Meyer East Gallery, Santa Fe, NM; Morris & Whiteside Galleries, Hilton Head, SC; Anne Irwin Fine Art, Atlanta, GA. —**BONNIE GANGELHOFF**



**Jack in the Lake, oil, 36 x 24.**