
Art

Elaborate Still Lives Erupt with Vivid Color in Eric Wert's Oil Paintings

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“Acquiesce” (2021), oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. All images © Eric Wert, shared with permission

“For me, the experience of painting an object reveals just how alien and unknowable it truly is,” says [Eric Wert](#), whose vibrant still lifes seem to glow from within. From decadent bouquets that overflow from their vases to a pair of rain-speckled magnolia branches, the subjects of the Portland, Oregon-based artist’s oil paintings are portrayed in hyperrealistic detail.

Wert draws on his background in scientific illustration, a discipline that attracted him “because of the emphasis on rigorous accuracy in representation,” he says. “Over time, I found that objective technical drawings would never convey the complex feelings experienced while observing my subjects.”

Contributing to the long history of [still life](#) in European art history, Wert’s compositions take a contemporary view of the tradition while retaining the elements that characterize the genre: composition and precision. “My oil paintings are intended to be both seductive and destructive—a highly controlled meditation on the impossibility of control,” he says. Abundant flowers spill from displays and cross sections of fruit reveal sensual textures. The backdrops also complement the central subject, often depicting ornamental textiles or wallpaper patterns.

Wert references the qualities of [vanitas](#) painting in particular, which brim with symbolism intended to remind the viewer of the worthlessness of worldly desires or pleasures within the broader context of mortality. “Conveying a recognizable image happens early on in the process,” Wert says, “but my favorite part of the painting happens days or weeks later when I stop trying to control it—when I get out of the way and let the object reveal its other self.”

Three of the artist’s paintings are currently included in the group show *Still Life* at [Gallery Henoch](#) in New York City, which continues through April 12. Find more on Wert’s [website](#), where prints of some of his paintings are available for purchase in addition to a selection of puzzles and cards published by [Pomegranate](#). Stay up to date by following the artist on [Instagram](#).