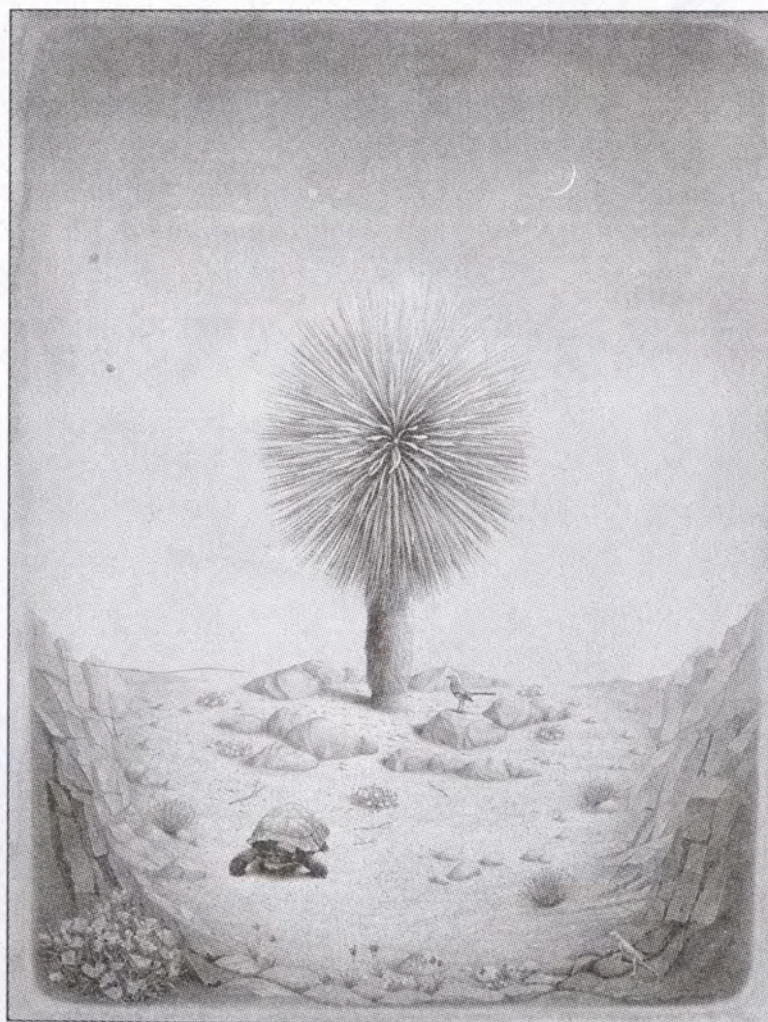


## SUSAN McDONNELL: STILL LIVES: NEW WORK

The lovely, muted subtleties of the colors in Susan McDonnell's paintings on panels have an intensity that conveys the luminosity of space. Surfaces both of light and of shade seem to vibrate internally, as if the egg tempera-based pigments have been enabled to hold their colors, undiminished in their essence. Birds, grasshoppers, frogs, turtles, and spiders populate some of these fantasy pastorals, and in some cases McDonnell plays with the convention of borders in such a way as to evoke the delicate patterning of Indian miniature painting. Or else, as in *Natural History* (also bordered) one thinks of a mini *Wunderkammer*, or "cabinet of curiosities." In this painting there is a beetle, an egg, a somewhat forlorn daisy "specimen," a dragonfly, and a centrally positioned eucalyptus pod. Small in scale and painted in painstakingly detailed exactitude, each member of this small assemblage of objects demands close attention. There doesn't have to be an overarching theme or reason for their presence; it is enough that the artist chose to lavish her attention on them and set them apart for our scrutiny. In *Desert Still Life* the central presence is a yucca estrada that is situated in an ambigu-



Susan McDonnell, *Desert Still Life*, egg tempera on panel, 40" x 30", 2007

KLAUDIA MARR GALLERY  
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ous space whose laws of nature seem foreign. Painted in tiny, countless strokes, the yucca seems to vibrate beneath slightly ominous aqua skies. It is as if the fluorescent, lunar atmosphere carries the painting in the direction of a kind of narrative mysticism. *Meadow* is populated with stylized flowers rendered as jewel-like mandalas. They bristle with an energy that belies their seemingly decorative effect. The surface of *Down the Garden Path* is composed of tiny facets that stir the picture into life: the translucent colors seem to loosen the picture plane and give birth to its central occupant—a single, intricately rendered flower. In fact, in all of these paintings, there seems to be a use of ornamentation that suggests both the spiritual and the popular nature of images that are, on the face of it, wholly decorative. The artist appears to use the process of painting as a way to unleash the radiance of color and convey its intrinsic properties, at once rich and transparent. The colors thus have a physical vibrancy and resonance that make McDonnell's pictures come alive.

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