



SUSAN MCDONNELL

A Quiet Nature

“Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That’s the problem,” says A.A. Milne from the popular book *Winnie the Pooh*. This quote has directly affected the new work of artist Susan McDonnell, who will be showcasing her magical, highly realistic animal and wildlife paintings at Sullivan Goss. While her past collections have explored the intricacies of still life, she slowly expanded to include living elements.

The show title, *A Quiet Nature*, perfectly represents the feeling behind the work and even McDonnell’s artistic process. “That’s what a lot of what these paintings are about,” she explains. “These quiet encounters. I have these moments where everything

stops and puts me in a place outside of language. You get really quiet and [the animals] are observing me too. It’s just this quiet place.”

Richard Louv, author of *Our Wild Calling* and a large influence on McDonnell’s work, furthers, “McDonnell follows a long tradition, from John James Audubon to Robert Bateman. She paints the mystery we can sense, but never fully understand, in the lives of the family of animals, of which we are members.”

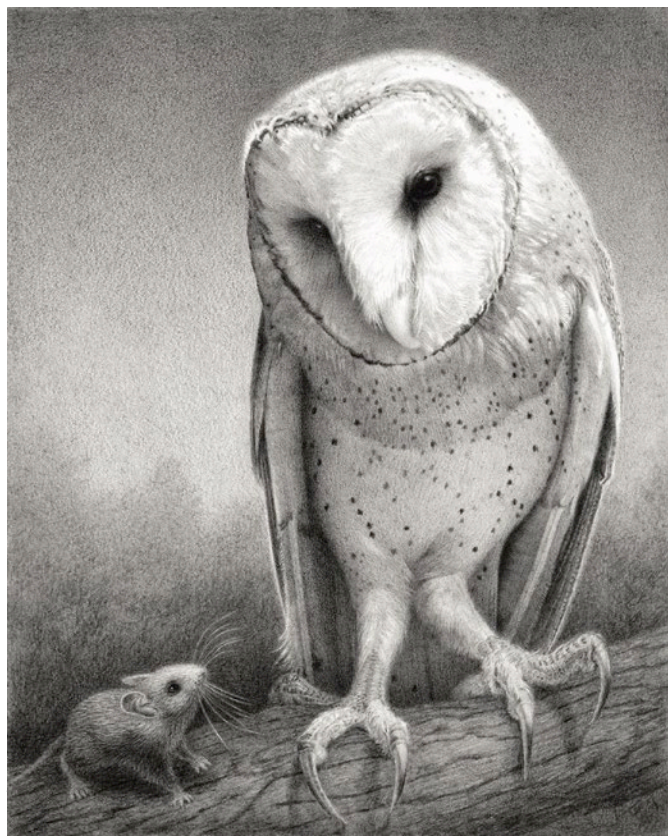
In addition, the new paintings have a storytelling element. There isn’t a specific narrative, but rather what’s occurring in McDonnell’s mind as she captures these animals. “It’s more about what it’s like

to be in their world,” she furthers. “What happens is I completely lose track of time and space, and lose myself to the point that there is no self.”

McDonnell spends quality time with her subject matter, taking the time to intimately photograph rabbits, insects, birds and squirrels, to name just a few. She explains, “Photography is a big part of my process, it has to be my experience with these animals. There was a marsh that housed a rabbit den across the street where I lived in California, and I would spend hours photographing them, sitting quietly so they were comfortable with me. I would disappear.”

Her process continues by using a collage technique, by taking her reference photos and piecing together different parts. “Maybe the ears aren’t right, so I take from another image,” she says. “I start drawing and place elements together that are taken out of the environment. It’s almost like a diorama.”

Viewers can expect to see a mix of watercolor, oil and graphite at *A Quiet Nature*. McDonnell transitions between mediums, so as to find new appreciation and perspective. She explains, “Graphite is, to me, like taking a break from watercolor and oil—it’s just pencil and paper and it’s very relaxing. Next is watercolor and again, it’s just water and my paints. There’s a simplicity about it. Oil is very satisfying but can be quite





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labor intensive.”

McDonnell takes on a similar balancing act with the dichotomy of light and dark. “I live with a painting for like a month, so after living in the dark undergrowth, like in the piece *Turtle and Squirrel*, I want the air to come in and explore a lighter theme,” she says. While she’s also greatly inspired by the work of Dutch Golden Age artist Otto Marseus van Schrieck, whose paintings have very dark tones, McDonnell is more light hearted and whimsical.

Starting May 29, collectors can step into the dreamlike state of McDonnell’s work at Sullivan Goss. The hope is that viewers will take with them a different way of looking at the world. McDonnell takes more inspiration from Louv’s book *Our Wild Calling* in saying, “These paintings are the pauses, the space between thoughts and words, where we sense a real connection with animals.” ●

Sullivan Goss – An American Gallery
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- 1 *Benevolent Owl*, graphite on panel, 10 x 8"
- 2 *Marsh Hare*, watercolor on panel, 12 x 9"
- 3 *Blue Jay*, oil on panel, 11 x 14"
- 4 *Turtle and Squirrel*, oil on panel, 20 x 16"