



At one point in his professional career, California artist Dan McCaw's main objective was to capture the likeness of the model and convey a sense of similitude of the subject before him. Today, his purpose as a painter lies in the journey of creative discovery, finding his true voice—or “true north” as he calls it—and pushing past the boundaries that separate the traditional and modern art worlds. “When you’re a young artist, you want to capture what’s in front of you as accurately as possible,” McCaw says. “When you’re further along in your career, you are more concerned with taking what’s inside of you and bringing it out on the canvas.”

McCaw, now in his late 60s, spent many years teaching at Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California. He taught traditional art techniques and became



ABOVE
Harmony of Grays
2011, oil, 24 x 36. All artwork
this article private collection.

RIGHT
Sisters
2010 oil, 36 x 24.

Dan McCaw: SEARCHING FOR AN INNER LIKENESS

Weekend
with the
Masters
PRESENTED BY CONTEMPORARY & CONTEMPORARY 1 STUDIO, PORTOLA, CA
PORTOLA HOTEL & SPA, MONTEREY, CA

THIS SEASONED PAINTER AND INSTRUCTOR BELIEVES THAT
THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE ARTISTIC PROCESS IS
THE EXPRESSION OF AN INDIVIDUAL VOICE AND VISION.

by **Allison Malafronte**

one of the most sought-after instructors of realism of the 1980s and 1990s. Today, he spends his days painting alongside his two sons—abstract artist John McCaw and representational expressionist Danny McCaw—in their 5,000-square-foot Los Angeles studio, and he allows himself the freedom to embrace new stylistic directions and inspiration. “I believe a painting should reveal as much about the artist as it does the subject,” he says. “At a certain point in my professional development, I looked at my paintings and I didn’t see myself. Something was missing. I was no longer content with a technically accurate painting; I knew there was more.”

As McCaw began searching for a style that was true to his inner self, his brushwork became looser, and he began to think in terms of patterns, shapes, and design. He

removed predictability by always leaving something to the viewer’s imagination. As he experimented with the expressiveness of abstract painting, the fear he initially encountered gave way to freedom. Above all, he only permitted himself to cross the creative finish line if he had accurately conveyed how he felt about his subject. “Capturing an emotion is so much more powerful than just copying an appearance,” says the artist. “I don’t want to be restricted by rules of what something should look like. I want to bring my own personal interpretation to the canvas and connect with viewers on a higher emotional level.”

When looking at either McCaw’s representational or abstract work, it is clear that he is an artist who invites the participation of the viewer. Every painting has an element of intrigue

and mystery—we’re welcomed into private moments and are asked to bring our own perspective and life experience to the painting to help solve the puzzle. In several of McCaw’s restaurant and café scenes, such as *Morning Light* and *Harmony of Grays*, we wonder whether the solitary figure is waiting for someone to arrive or if someone has just left her. Is she content being alone and relishing her freedom, or is she feeling despondent and displaced? The answer depends on who is viewing the painting.

Stylistically, we can find in McCaw’s work divergent techniques from modern and traditional art joining together to form a unique visual world: his strategically placed abstract patterns and dramatic use of light are reminiscent of the paintings

Morning Light
2010, oil, 24 x 36.



The Bather
2010, oil, 12 x 9.



Dan McCaw will be an instructor at *American Artist's* third annual Weekend With the Masters Workshop & Conference, September 7 through 10 in Monterey, California. McCaw will present a lecture and demonstration on the principles of art and will teach two workshops titled “Finding Your Artistic Individuality.” For more information and to register, visit www.aamastersweekend.com.



of such contemporary illustrators as Bernie Fuchs (1932–2009) and Mark English (1933–); and his emotive handling of color and light, scratchy brushwork, and lost edges reveal the influence of his teacher, Russian master Sergei Bongart (1918–1985). A strong humanistic message also comes through McCaw’s mysterious figures, moody atmospherics, and piercing light, and the artist admits to being strongly influenced by the philosophies of psychologist Carl Jung. He has been particularly moved by the idea that we are all ultimately alone, even when surrounded by familiar people and places. His work alludes to this and to other ideas about human strengths, frailties, questioning, and reasoning.

Because McCaw has spent many years searching for an authentic

message while not allowing himself to be bound by the opinions of others, he has gained the respect of artists and students worldwide. As an instructor, McCaw believes in teaching artists the fundamentals of painting as a starting point and then encouraging them to find their own way. “Painting is like driving,” McCaw says in one of the many thought-provoking analogies he uses to describe his beliefs on painting. “You don’t learn how to drive a car for the sake of driving; you learn how to drive so that you can eventually go somewhere. It’s the same with painting. Once you’ve mastered the fundamentals, it’s time to start your own journey and find where you are meant to go.” ■

Allison Malafronte is the senior editor of American Artist.



ABOUT THE ARTIST



Dan McCaw was raised in Montana and attended Montana Tech, in Butte; Academy of Art University, in San Francisco; Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California; and the Bongart School of Art, in Santa Monica, California. He was an instructor at Art Center College of Design for 17 years and received an honorary doctorate from Academy of Art University. Throughout his career he has had more than 50 solo exhibitions and has been the subject of numerous articles in national and international magazines. McCaw is at the forefront of bridging representational art with contemporary sensibilities and believes in encouraging artists to find a unique voice and vision. For more information on McCaw, visit www.mccawfineart.com.

LEFT
Conversation
2009, oil, 20 x 20

OPPOSITE PAGE
Afternoon Light
2010, oil, 12 x 9.