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PATRICK PUCKETT

# Push and pull

**W**hen Patrick Puckett is painting, he finds himself surrendering to the canvas, letting the manual process of applying paint dictate the evolution of what's depicted. It's a challenging practice for Puckett, but one he says he must do in order to be happy.

"You have to just get paint on the canvas, and like writing a song, it kind of tells you the chorus needs to be added here, or the verse needs to be here," Puckett, 35, from Austin, Texas, says. "You have a dialogue with the shapes, the lines and colors, like a fight or a nice chat. You let the painting tell you where it needs to go."

The direction of the pieces in Puckett's collection at Wally Workman Gallery veers toward "a Southern gothic feel," Puckett says, the 15 paintings and 10 drawings depicting figures with indifferent or melancholy faces, with moody hues transporting figures to dark worlds. Puckett's subjects may be inspired by real life, such as from photographs from the myriad weddings he's attended recently, but scenes such as the matrimonial celebration in *Music and Lake* are freshly imagined.

The mix of bright and gloomy elements in his paintings, such as the vivid pinks and blues that highlight the dark shadows and sullen expressions on the bikini-clad subjects of *Women*, is a trademark that makes Puckett stand out to collectors.

"One of the qualities I appreciate is the contrast between light and dark, both literally and figuratively," says collector Matthew Shawl. "For example, a woman on the beach drenched in sunlight with dark brooding eyes, or a solitary man at a party wearing a brightly checked shirt starting down at his drink lost in thought, or a wedding party in a lush tropical environment with blank stares. He creates the same dark/light feeling you might get by



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1  
*Women*, oil on canvas,  
60 x 78"

2  
*Palms*, oil on canvas,  
36 x 36"

3  
*The Tomato Picker*,  
oil on canvas, 60 x 48"

4  
*Music and Lake*,  
oil on canvas, 60 x 72"

watching Disney's *Cinderella* off camera enjoying a cigarette."

Puckett adds and subtracts as he's painting, moving in-between thick application of paint and using more of a thin wash technique. A lover of figure drawing, Puckett often focuses on the figure in unconventional ways. His *Palms* shows a young man peering straight at the viewer, atop a background featuring a new motif Puckett has become interested in: palm tree fronds. The figure in *The Tomato Picker* is also looking straight at the viewer, the work bathed in a yellow-greenish color offset by the few bright reds of the tomato. The piece is as close to a self-portrait as Puckett has painted, as his father grew tomatoes, though Puckett says none of the figures in his work are actual people.

"I don't want my paintings to come across as portraits," Puckett says. "I want them to come across somewhere between almost staged and confrontational. I love when figures look straight on, but not for any kind of narrative reason—like a pretty painting that can make you feel a little uncomfortable."

He says his paintings "are a struggle of flying by the seat of your pants and making a visual judgment," a contrast Wally Workman Gallery partner Rachel Stephens says is evident.

"Patrick describes painting as a tough sport, and you can see that is how he feels in his paintings," Stephens says. "There is a push and pull of color, a push and pull of light and dark, a push and pull of paint and canvas. His work is the struggle of the game, and the layers upon layers of paint, the plays that make it up." ●



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