

The California Artist: Daniel Gibson "Ocotillo Song" @ Almine Rech, New York

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Evan Pricco



When I think of the works of Daniel Gibson, I think of him as the quintessential California painter. His subject matter is one of the state's past, present and future, its vitality and wealth, its labor and its people. The works, especially his newest paintings, are landscapes but in a truly California sense, where fields of flowers, farmland, farm workers and the sun all combine into a rich heritage and deep reds and browns and earth tones everywhere.

The title of Gibson's new show, *Ocotillo Song*, on view at Almine Rech, New York through July 30th, refers to the ocotillo, "a shrub ubiquitous in the southern and southwestern deserts of North America." Again, the backdrop is this utopian dream of California and the reality it may present. This isn't the Gold Rush or Hollywood, or even the Golden Gate. Those only occupy in memory a certain stature of opportunity and Manifest Destiny that is often self-referential. Gibson is working in a Steinbeckian fashion of land and labor, or movement and migration.

The gallery notes in particular "A portrait of Gibson's mother in *Strawberry Fields* reimagines a fraught moment, a biographical story from her days picking strawberries, with her family, as a child in Salinas, California. A defiant gestural middle finger in extreme perspective protrudes upwards from her body – seemingly motion-captured – as she carries the weight of one giant strawberry across her back." These works are personal for Gibson, but also set into the backdrop of a wider history of the state. He has grown into being a particularly special storyteller, one that redefines what a place means and what a lineage looks like in oils. —Evan Pricco