



The Weekly Nosh

BY DANIELLE & MARLEE

THE WEEKLY NOSH is a recurring email featuring one singular artwork, chosen and curated by Danielle Dewar and Marlee Katz of Tchotchke Gallery. By spotlighting these works, we aim to introduce you to paintings you might not otherwise see. The world of collecting is your oyster and we're here to help cultivate it!



Natalie Steigmann-Gall
Sentimental Reasons, 2023

Oil on canvas
48 x 36 inches

Participating artist Natalie Steigmann-Gall is a painter working at the intersection of art, elder care and social research. Her recent body of work is centered on her role as a caregiver and companion for the elderly with Duet Care at Home. She uses an expressionist combination of materials to engage portraiture and cityscape through the lens of social theory, creating interpretations of the home, the subway, the street, and other complex arenas. She graduated with her BFA in painting and drawing from Ohio State University in December of 2020.

We caught up with Natalie recently to chat about her practice, her experience at Duet and how this continues to influence her artistic process. You can find the full interview below!



You have previously mentioned being interested in the psychological and sociological dynamics of portraiture. How do these aspects influence your artistic process and the subjects you choose to depict?

Natalie Steigmann-Gall: While I was getting my BFA, I also got a BA in sociology and spent over two years writing a qualitative research thesis about art and gentrification in Columbus, OH. I was fascinated by the theorists I was learning about and the rigorous process of social research, and those interests became the focus of my BFA show. I spent most of my time in college working on these dual projects and liked to say that the art thesis was about sociology and the sociology thesis was about art. The passions of my life always seem to end up intertwined in this way.

As a portraitist I've never felt my purpose is to tell the stories of my subjects - I don't think that's really possible. In my work I try to tell the story of my relationship to the subject - whether that be family member, stranger, or, as has been the

case recently, caregiver. Thanks in large part to the work of Black scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, many social scientists have an approach to research that rejects the idea of an objective "God's eye view" of their subjects. I was taught to legitimize my own perspective and social position as a critical research tool, and that's how I see my painting as well.

The truth is caregiving is difficult, high skill labor essential to our society, but it's not treated that way. The company that I work for, Duet, specializes in social companionship, which, vital as it is to the physical and mental health of seniors, is not covered by health insurance, so we aren't able to reach all the people who need and deserve this care. I'm fortunate to love my job, and I can only tell the story of my own small role in a fraught system.

As a working artist and a caregiver for Duet, how do you balance your creative practice with the responsibilities of caring for others?

NSG: After graduation I moved to New York and stumbled into a career in elder care, and have been surprised by how much that's informed my practice. Most of my clients have Alzheimer's disease or dementia, and that is an immense responsibility. Balancing that with my own needs is challenging - between my day job and my career, sometimes I'm out of the house for 12 or more hours at a time! It's difficult but immensely fulfilling and meaningful to me.

I do it because every day I get to forge honest connections with people who need me, to appreciate the moments of beauty and stillness you can find in urban life if you look, to hone my own sense of empathy, to see New York City through the eyes of people who've lived in it for 80 years. To try and try and keep trying every week to bring joy and meaning to the life of someone who will never get better, or who might but doesn't care to try, or who, if I'm lucky, will start to live a life less burdened because of my presence in it.

We spoke previously about your body of work that is inspired by your work at Duet. Can you expand upon this for those unfamiliar with your practice?

NSG: I've always been interested in the social arenas that surround me, and that includes the home. In my two years of working with the elderly, I've had the privilege to develop intimate relationships from my client's homes, which most of them have been living in for longer than I've been alive. I'm interested in the connections we've made despite all the time in between us, and all the history that lives in the space of that difference.

The challenge of this work is learning each person's highly specific needs and histories, and responding to them in ways that take into account their personal sensibilities. You have to anticipate the problems or desires that they can't articulate. I express my love for my clients in part through memorizing the details of their homes and lives. For instance, one of my clients is an author - to grow closer with her, I read her books.

I think all this is reflected in my work, which is highly observant and attentive. I've long been interested in the inferences the viewer can glean from the objects that surround my subjects, and with these two large scale forays in environmental portraiture, I've been able to really explore that idea.

In your work with Duet, how do you spotlight your artistic skills to connect with clients and create a positive impact in their lives?

NSG: My clients reflect a wide range of personalities and experiences, and I work hard to share my authentic self with them while keeping in mind which approach

they'd best respond to. As an artist you have to rely on your intuition and quickly adapt when something doesn't work, and I use those skills every day in elder care.

For some of my clients, my life as an artist comes up as a conversation topic. I share all my career updates with them, and that can provide a lot of excitement. Some of my clients were married to artists and especially love to see my work. And some are artists themselves, and we make work together. Sometimes we just do this side by side, but other times I give advice or work on the piece with them. One of my clients is a retired art teacher, so she and I clicked right away.

During my early months in NYC, my first client and I traveled all around Manhattan. I planned outings based on his interests and using the knowledge I was accruing as a young artist in the city. I took a picture of him and his wife on their final wedding anniversary, and after he passed away, she commissioned me to paint it, as a family heirloom for their grandchildren.

To learn more about Natalie or for any questions, you may reach out to us here!



We are hiring creatives and artists to support older adults in New York City

The Opportunity

If you're a creative professional with consistent part-time or full-time availability, our positions could be a great fit. Our mission is to improve the lives of older adults by matching them with a caregiver or companion with whom they can form an authentic connection. Many of our clients are artists and creatives themselves, or lifelong patrons of the arts.

You may also be asked to provide support with common daily tasks, such as grocery shopping or meal preparation. It's important to know that you will NOT be asked to perform any "hands-on" or personal care assistance.

About us

Since 2015, we've hired hundreds of creatives, performers, and artists who have found fulfillment in this work. Duet is now a trusted provider of support services to older adults with numerous case managers, elder care professionals, and healthcare institutions in New York City.

Contact Us

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