

# Katie Musolff finds color in riverside flora, fauna and flotsam

By Rafael Francisco Salas | March 11, 2016



Courtesy of Tory Folliard Gallery  
 Katie Musolff's "My Spring Collection."

Katie Musolff and Andy Fletcher say they are old souls. For me, though, their paintings describe a childlike wonder, an exultant surprise at seeing the mysterious color of a beetle or the depth of the sky at dawn.

The couple's shared exhibit at the Tory Folliard Gallery is full of such encounters.

Musolff has created her most mature paintings to date. Known for her portraits, including of elderly Milwaukeeans, and as the second artist-in-residence at the Pfister Hotel, she has taken a step into her own since then.

Loosely rendered watercolor and graphite on paper depict the flotsam, feathers and foundlings that she finds along the banks of the Mississippi River, where she and Fletcher now live.

She calls this new body of work "River Journal," and the studies are reminiscent of the exacting observations of naturalists such as John James Audubon.

However, they are more whimsical and considerably more romantic, verging on sentimental. Musolff is clearly moved by the dead birds and insects she collects and by ripening vegetables grown near her home. The paintings are like love notes written on nature and art. Her confidently washy description of a dead bluebird balanced above a rusty orange twig is titled "For the Pure Love of Color."

Composition is a critical strength of these paintings. "My Spring Collection" presents a well-arranged grouping of butterflies, feathers, spiders and uprooted flowers and leaves.



Courtesy of Tory Folliard Gallery  
Andy Fletcher's "For Jeremiah Williams."

They are cataloged tenderly. A daffodil bulb with root tendrils and clumps of dirt still attached points to a discarded nest, while stems and bloom arc across the paper to lead the eye to a precious, spotted white butterfly. The birds, cracked eggs and new dandelions are arranged with equal sensitivity. The whole becomes an earthy homage to the pleasure and peril of nature as it progresses into a new season.

Fletcher's landscapes in oil are also painted with a nostalgic air. They describe the skies and expanses of rural Wisconsin with a sense of majesty. Though peaceful and poetic, they remain somewhat aspirational. Perhaps they aspire to abstraction. The paintings seem more connected to strategies stemming from artists Wolf Kahn or Richard Diebenkorn than to conventional landscape. His work seems to want to tell us what land and sky feel like, rather than how they appear.



Courtesy of Tory Folliard Gallery  
Musolff's "For the Pure Love of Color."

For most of us, the natural world is defined by the systems we use to control it, or by how much we are controlled by it.

For artists such as Musolff and Fletcher, however, color and nature are constantly renewed, bringing the jubilation of the new, like seeing the first green shoots in spring.

Because of unusual interest in the show, an abbreviated version of the "Introducing Katie Musolff and Andy Fletcher: Old Souls" will remain on view at Tory Folliard Gallery, 233 N. Milwaukee St., through April 9. For more information visit [toryfolliard.com](http://toryfolliard.com).

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