

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHTS

Highlighting the works of painters Mary Kay West, Luke Anderson, Matthew Grant, and Linda Glover Gooch, and sculptor Bob Guelich

WRITTEN BY Norman Kolpas



Mary Kay West does more than merely “fool the eye” with her trompe-l’oeil still-life paintings. In her recent work *White Roses and Bluebird*, for example, she certainly creates, as any artist working in that genre should, the powerful illusion that we are gazing into an actual, almost life-sized, three-dimensional scene. The overall effect, however, feels not just real but also quietly profound, a moment suspended in time that captures the living spirit of its subjects.

It shouldn’t surprise, then, to learn that West has a background steeped in spiritual pursuits. Originally trained and working in clinical and educational psychology, the native of Asheville, North Carolina,



*Peonies and Fairy Wrens*  
Oil on Panel | 16 x 24 inches



*Roses and Bluebirds*  
Oil on Panel | 24 x 18 inches

eventually left that field to become a student and teacher of Eastern yoga philosophy, including a daily meditative practice she continues. Although she’d had early art training from her mother, a gifted watercolorist, West only began studying seriously in 2003 at the Fine Arts League of Asheville under Ben Long and John Mac Kah. Even then, she preferred still-life painting over assignments in landscapes, figures, and portraits. “It felt very intimate

to sit with and contemplate a set of beautiful, interesting objects and paint them,” she explains. “Those moments of being taken out of yourself are the most ‘at one’ you can be with the world.” She shares such profound experiences, in turn, with others through her finished paintings.

In 2007, her studies concluded, West moved to California to launch a fine art career, eventually settling about five years ago in the small, semi-rural town of Guadalupe, north of Santa Barbara. Her talent has been recognized every year since 2015 by the California Art Club’s Gold Medal Exhibition, and, in 2022, she participated in the prestigious Birds in Art show at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin, which added one of her paintings to its permanent collection. “That was a very huge honor.” In 2023, she was designated an Associate Master Artist by the Art Renewal Center.

Though West could claim mastery, she continues to

delve ever more deeply into her illusory genre. Take, for example, *Wall Sconce with Roses and Peonies*. Most such paintings beckon viewers’ eyes to gaze into their depths. Here, however, the sconce seems to jut outward from the canvas’s plane. “No trompe-l’oeil is easy,” she says of the effect, “but it was more difficult to have most of the painting appear to be in the background, with only the two front roses and one of the two hummingbirds in the very foreground.” And, seeking ever more challenges, she’s thinking of incorporating human figures into future works. “There are a couple of historical pieces I’ve seen with them,” West says with a chuckle, “and I’m playing around with that idea.”

West’s paintings are represented by American Legacy Fine Arts in Pasadena, California; Portico Gallery in Montecito, California; and by appointment at Mary Kay West Fine Art Atelier in Santa Barbara, California.



*Wall Sconce with Roses and Peonies*

Oil on Panel | 24 x 30 inches