



ANDREA JOHNSON



Goldfinches and Coneflowers, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 16 x 20 inches

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Andrea Johnson keeps her observant eye closely attuned to the world of living things. The plant and animal kingdoms are her domain, their abundant variations on form, pattern, and color the substance and stimulus that motivates her art.

The impulse to represent living things is intrinsic to human creativity. From pre-historic cave drawings to the first advanced civilizations, animals and plants adorned pottery, bronzes, and jewelry, as well as the walls of palaces and tombs. The Romans—judged by the remains of Pompeii—painted gardens filled with flowers and birds on their walls. Indigenous cultures everywhere embellish ritual objects with birds, fish, and mammals. In the Middle Ages, flowers were copied into herbals, the books used to identify plants for medicinal purposes, and when explorers brought plant species into Europe from newly discovered territories, artists were engaged to illustrate them. Northern European still life painting grew out of the fervor to show off these new blooms.

Johnson has long taken photographs of plants, and she begins her art making process begins by choosing one of these to paint. She also consults a large library of reference materials, her resource for animal anatomy and coloration. Out of this longstanding engagement with the natural world she orchestrates richly patterned and brilliantly colored paintings such as *Morning Glories and Hummingbirds*, 2014, or *Bluebirds and Persimmons*, 2014. Minutely observed and intricately rendered fruit, flowers, and perching birds fill these panels from top to bottom, in a crush, offering a glimpse into a teeming world, at once familiar, yet mysteriously foreign.

Not long ago, Johnson completed a series of landscape paintings with distant clouds and receding hills—a challenging but highly successful style transition. In several of her recent works she incorporates this new perspective. Both *Magnolia with Kinglet*, 2014, and *Goldfinches and Cone Flowers*, 2014, explore this spatial relationship by letting the background drop away into a hazy field of color, highlighting the subject. Thus they become individuals, specific creatures and flowers, as opposed to components of a large pattern.

In all her work the artist engages with every detail, describing each vein and crease of leaf and flower petal, the imperceptible transition of a bird's feather from one brilliant color to the next, or the fading from green to brown in an autumn leaf. The luminosity and depth Johnson achieves results from a labor-intensive process, in which she applies acrylics interspersed with seven or eight applications of medium to catch and reflect the light.

Following her interlude immersed in the expansive vistas of the Salinas Valley landscape, Johnson enthusiastically returned to the sphere of small creatures and the intricacies of their domain for this current exhibition. Her jewel-like renderings of birds and their flowery habitat reveal her intuitive communion with them. Too few of us take the time to experience this world, but Johnson's new exhibition gives us all a free pass.

HELAINÉ GLICK
CURATORIAL ADVISOR



Sparrows and Magnolia, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 8 x 11 inches



Magpies, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 15 x 19 inches



Goldfinches and Artichokes, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 11 x 14 inches



Bluebirds and Persimmons, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 12 x 16 inches



Hummingbird and Bird of Paradise, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 11 x 14 inches



Two Hummingbirds and Red Hot Poker, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 8 x 10 inches



Morning Glories and Hummingbird, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 8 x 9 inches

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Front Cover: **Magnolia and Kinglet**, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 8 x 10 inches
Back Cover: **Kinglets and Magnolias**, 2014, Acrylic on Panel, 11 x 11 inches

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