



*Magnolia I* (2009) was influenced by Bates' interest in Cézanne.

ART

## More paint, less paint: David Bates

Latest works to be at Dallas Art Fair

By **GAILE ROBINSON**  
Special Contributor

Last year at the first Dallas Art Fair, David Bates was everywhere, in person and in paint, in numerous galleries. The second Dallas Art Fair opens Friday and, this time, Bates may again be the most overexposed artist — or he may be more discreetly

low-profile.

"After last year, it'd be OK to be the invisible man," he says. "I was proud, but ..."

His unmistakable paintings of fishermen, fishing guides, and swamps and their inhabitants were prominently displayed by his two galleries, Dunn and Brown Contemporary in Dallas and John Berggruen in San Francisco, as well as other galleries tapping into his popularity.



DAVID BATES

This year, that booming success is represented instead with a wealth of blooms, in new floral still lifes showing at the Art Fair and at an exhibition that's

opened at Dunn and Brown.

The Dallas artist has included floral works in his shows before, but never this many and, at first glance, the flowers seem lightweight, coming

on the heels of the Katrina series that he began in 2006. That was his response to the flooding of New Orleans and the despair of its citizens.

"It was such a heavy, important topic," Bates says of New Orleans. "I love that city. I witnessed all of that. But those paintings are very tough to look at, and they were tough for me to paint. After I was done with them, a

See **DAVID** Page 3E

## David Bates at the Art Fair

Continued from Page 1E

little bit of me wanted to back off."

### Sweet magnolias

He retreated into the magnolias that he has used as his bellwether or his evolution marker. He returns to the subject matter year after year, and how he paints the magnolia tells him how his art is progressing.

The magnolias of 2009 and 2010 were influenced by a bunch of past-tense painters.

"I went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and saw 'Cézanne and Beyond.' It had all the people he had influenced: Matisse, Picasso, Marsden Hartley, Max Beckmann, and a bunch of other people," he explains. "I was trying to figure out what they saw and what they did. I was thinking of them as a painting club, a dead guys club, and I'm going to be one at some point, and I just want to get my membership in."

"One of the things Matisse said he got from Cézanne was the air. I looked at the Cézannes, and they are almost not finished. When I saw that, I thought OK, I could probably stand to lighten up and not fill every square inch."

He tried to stop short of completion. Some of his magnolias float in absolute voids, and others are rooted in coffee cans, placed on chairs with a scene outside the window. He is working

toward a bare background, empty of settings; he lets his under-painting show through and allows his corrections to be a part of the composition. This is new for Bates. "I wanted the history of how the painting is built to be there," he says.

His signature brushwork, heavy with a strong black outline, is still apparent, but there are areas where he has scraped away paint and not come back to fill it in, and he admits that was hard to do.

"He's really good at putting paint on a surface," says Charlie Wylie, curator at the Dallas Museum of Art. "That is the thing that I've always seen and liked. He treats paint as a kind of object."

### All in the family

In the Dunn and Brown exhibition, "David Bates: Themes and Variations," he shows a series of five peony paintings. One of them is nothing more than a charcoal sketch of flowers in a vase on canvas. "I love the drawing," Bates says. "It had so much potential to it. I thought I'd leave that one and draw it again."

### Plan your life

The Dallas Art Fair runs Friday through Sunday at the Fashion Industry Gallery, 1807 Ross Ave. (Its entrance is on Akard.) Hours: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. \$20 general admission, \$40 for a three-day pass, with discounts. 214-871-7930. [www.dallasartfair.com](http://www.dallasartfair.com)

"David Bates: Themes and Variations" continues through Feb. 20 at Dunn and Brown Contemporary, 5020 Tracy St. 214-521-4322. [www.dunnandbrown.com](http://www.dunnandbrown.com).

He shows two paintings on either side of the charcoal sketch; all of them are of a family. "You're seeing several different tries at a similar picture," Bates says. "They don't look all that different. Like they have a different sauce. One has more habanero, another is a little peachy."

He tried not using his strong black outline and admits that the results are a little "smushy." Eventually, the last of the peony series looks the closest to what he usually does, and here he stopped.

"You start off different, you try and get away, and you end up back where you started," he says.

This is part of his success. His paintings are unmistakable, even as he tries breathing air around them, they are of the family. Even his sculptures look like his paintings. The have a flat, two-dimensional quality that shouldn't be there, yet there it is.

"I think it just happens," Bates says. "I look at sculpture like painting, and since a lot of them are painted, there is a sensibility, or lack of it, that makes it that way."