

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

Willie Stewart

Everything Has a Crack

January 21 – February 20, 2021

Opening reception Thursday, January 21, 11AM - 6PM

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery is pleased to present *Everything Has a Crack*, Willie Stewart's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Willie Stewart's still life and landscape paintings are long-resonating as they examine and classify time, memory, absence, and melancholy in relation to the visual culture of America. Informed by the conceptual tenets of the Pictures Generation, Pop Art, collage, and geometric realism, the artist juxtaposes images—both specific and undefined—into pseudo mise-en-scènes with nods to technology, music, art history and architecture.

The exhibition's title derives from Leonard Cohen's 1992 song "Anthem"; in the chorus, Cohen sings "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." For Stewart, songs, like paintings and images, are containers of meaning that morph over time as one's own memory shifts and changes. In this case, Stewart mistakenly remembers the lyric as "everything has a crack," underlining a humility and honesty in the work, as well as the effects of nostalgia—a feeling free from the obligation of remembering something completely as it was or is.

The paintings, works on paper, and sculptures on view in *Everything Has a Crack* demonstrate a practice rooted in faithful reproduction. In *Still Life with Music* (all works 2020), for example, Stewart uses colored pencil, gouache, and acrylic paint to assiduously render retro wood paneling, a 17th century Dutch still life bouquet, a Depeche Mode EP cover, and a 1980s Gerhard Richter candle. These seemingly disparate images (alongside a ColorChecker, Renaissance-style window, and pumpkin) appear dimensionless within their sublime, twilight space, recontextualized and coexisting ambivalently.

As Josef Albers nested colors in his *Homage to the Square*, Stewart nests images. In *Tulip, From Weeds... Influence*, and *Sunset*, single flowers or bouquets are set on top of, or within, various backgrounds: the gridded geometry of brick or cinderblock, masoned flagstone, and the grain of wood paneling. On top of these grounds, the artist mounts hand cut cotton and polystyrene board, altering the dimensionality of the picture plane. Stewart frequently architects his paintings with geometric delineations such as windowsills or thresholds, indicating interior and exterior frameworks.

Two bucket-bound wooden posts, one black and one blue, stand in the gallery with drawings affixed at their tops. "POSTED," the black sign reads, followed by the first verse and refrain from The Smiths' 1984 song "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now." Across the room, blue monochromatic tulips begins to wilt atop the Xeroxed image of a German Romantic era landscape painting. These sculptures don't so much provide explicit direction as they instead suggest paths forward into unraveling our associations with the markings of culture.

Willie Stewart (b. 1982, Gallatin, TN) lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut. He received an MFA in Sculpture from Yale University (2018), and his BFA from The Cooper Union (2016). His work has been the subject of solo and two-person exhibitions at Morán Morán, Los Angeles, CA (2019); Soft Opening, London, UK, with Grace Abholm (2018); and Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, NY, with Brent Stewart (2017). He has also exhibited at Motel, Brooklyn, NY (2016, 2015); Seed Space, Nashville, TN (2016); Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA (2015); and Herron College of Art and Design, Indianapolis, IN (2015). Stewart completed residencies at Pioneer Works (2016), and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014).