

## GAGOSIAN

# LOS ANGELES CONFIDENTIAL

**What to Expect from Artist Dan Colen’s New Show at Gagosian, Beverly Hills**  
*Brooklyn-based artist, Dan Colen, shares insights and inspirations for his solo show, High Noon, which is on exhibition at the Gagosian, Beverly Hills through December 15.*

Matt Stewart



**What are the key elements of *High Noon*?**

**DAN COLEN:** *High Noon* is a show of nine paintings from a new series I call “Desert Paintings.” I’m using landscapes from the Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoons as reference, but think of them as more object than image. My aim is to have the paint be the primary guide helping to move the paintings forward toward their resolution.

**How does the paint as a primary guide accomplish this?**

**DC:** These paintings have developed slowly over the past few years. It is this time and the way in which I’ve come to handle the paint that defines these paintings most. The composition stays fixed and the original palette is interpreted through a deep study on the material of the paint itself. The surfaces are smooth and waxy but very dense and very opaque due to extremely thin

layers of paint built up. There is no impasto, but I think of the paint as thick. The most active parts of these works are derived from this buildup of paint, and the variations between the different pigments' surface qualities. The "Desert Paintings" are an opportunity for me and my audience to think about paint at its most elemental. They are paintings which depict dirt and earth made up of various components of dirt and earth.

**What is it about Wile E. Coyote as a character that provides inspiration for these works?**

**DC:** Wile E. Coyote's story has always felt very relatable. I've struggled with my own self-destructive tendencies, and I've witnessed many close to me be defeated by their's. Wile E.'s relentless, insatiable desire for the Road Runner is at once tragic, while his resilience and determination can offer hope. His inexhaustible tolerance for failure and ability to endlessly regenerate a new mischievous ambition connects directly with my artistic process. My practice places more value in the search than in the product itself.

**How have cartoons influenced your work overall?**

**DC:** In general, I find cartoons to be a great way to explore many of the themes I'm interested in. First, the consideration of how porous the boundaries are between reality and fantasy. Fears, the absurdity of our world and our lives, desire, comedy, death, beauty, failure and cliché are rich subjects within the cartoon world that I like to explore in my art.

**What other elements came into play as you created the Desert series?**

**DC:** As I mentioned earlier, the material of oil paint was my biggest concern. The images allowed for a structure, but the focus and effort went into the application. I had been trying to work figuratively without using illusionism in my paintings for the last several years. I believe these works have finally succeeded in that. I'd like the paint to represent itself. The image is only translated through the composition. I'm considering the application of the paint mostly in abstract terms. Each mark is only revealed by the application of the previous one. Planning is limited. This series is an opportunity for me to indulge in an exploration of oil paints infinite nuances.