

Ed Musante

Ed Musante is best known for his exquisitely rendered paintings of birds on vintage wooden cigar boxes that blur the distinction between art and popular culture. His paintings are both beautiful objects and puns on his art's commitment to depth of experience. Musante paints on the surface of found vintage cigar boxes using dry pigment suspended in acrylic gels, a technique that provides both the translucency and the viscous beauty of oil paint. Embossments, stamps, scratches and other marks of age show through the paint, and create "delicate collage effects." The empty, 3-D boxes are a reminder of Joseph Cornell's boxed assemblages of found detritus. While created for a different purpose, Musante like Cornell creates poetry from the commonplace, while making us question the artificially imposed categories of "high" and "low."

Influenced by Bay Area figurative painters Richard Diebenkorn who painted several works from his Ocean Park series on cigar boxes, and Nathan Oliveira's series of abstracted Hawk paintings, Musante's cigar box paintings have a powerful graphic quality that capture your attention from across a room. His soulful birds perch on twigs against a neutral background, edged by cigar brand labels that read "White Owl" or "Hand-Made," echoing and framing their painted subjects. Sometimes a beak or tail feather extends beyond the frame and as though Musante's birds could take wing at any moment.

Musante spent many years in San Francisco before his recent move to Tucson, Arizona. He obtained a BA in Art History from University of California, Berkeley in 1965 and then joined the Peace Corps, doing public health work in the West African country, Niger, through the end of the decade. In 1981, he received a B.F.A. from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Musante continued to paint and in 1999 received an M.F.A. from the University of Idaho. Ed Musante's paintings have been exhibited at galleries and museums all over the United States and are in several corporate and private collections.