



“I thought a lot about Paul Cézanne and paintings like The Card Players. Here are these big, earthy, heroic figures . . . and nobody knows who they are.”

DAVID BATES

David Bates

***The Cleaning Table*, 1990**

Oil on canvas

84 x 64 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Gift of the Barrett Collection, Dallas, TX

Acquired in 2014

© David Bates

This scene of rugged self-sufficiency, yet utter dependence upon the natural world, is common in the work of David Bates. A painter and sculptor born in North Texas, each year Bates traveled with his family to vacation on the Texas Gulf Coast. This annual voyage excited the young Bates, and he thrilled at witnessing the hard work of Galveston’s fishermen and the bounty provided by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Over time, the artist (a fisherman himself) grew ever more aware of the quality of the place itself—the light, water, people, and animals of the area seeped into Bates’s consciousness, where their influence continues to reside. As a student of art history, Bates is keenly aware of the rich lineage that painting provides him. The influence of artists such as Paul Cézanne, Jean-François Millet, Henri Matisse, who each drew inspiration for their art from daily life, is evident in Bates’s work. Indeed, among Bates’s favorite subjects are fishermen, fish, birds, and plant life—all part of the everyday experience of a place like Galveston.

Drawn to the natural settings of the Gulf Coast and the Grassy Lake area of Arkansas, Bates’s interest in the textures, sights, and sounds of these working-class regions is clearly represented in *The Cleaning Table*. The thick strokes of paint and muted colors used to depict birds, fish, and workers unite to convey the tactility of the act of cleaning fish and the quality of light found on an overcast day on the coast. Experienced firsthand, then painted from memory and sketches back in his Dallas studio, Bates’s subjects are imbued with a dignity and refinement not often associated with blue-collar workers and less-than-pristine beaches. His careful attention to the sensibility of a place, coupled with intense observational skills and carefully built-up layers of oil paint, combine to create monumental pictures of everyday workers. Bates conveys to us his unique vision of a place he loves.