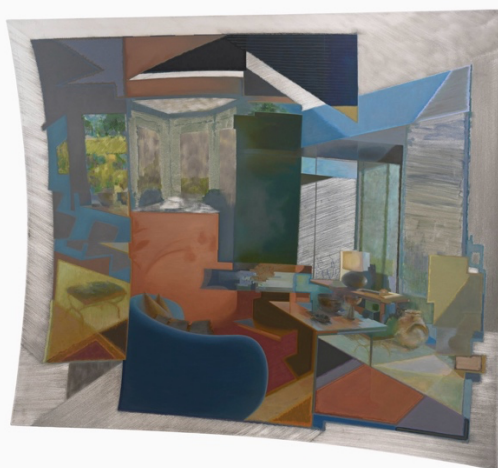


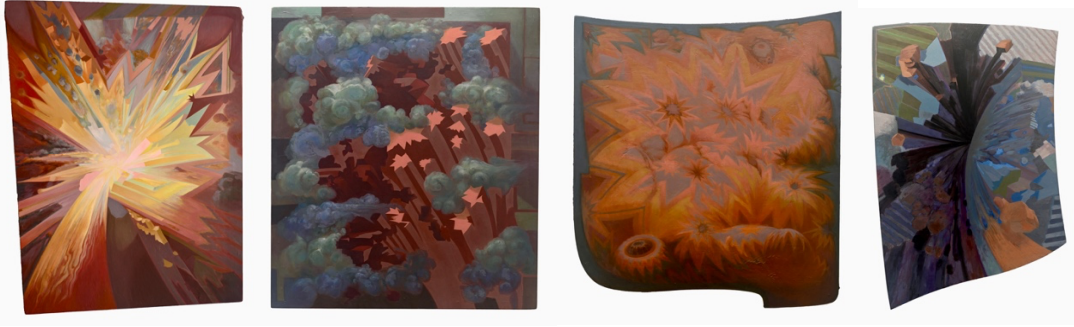
Dan Sutherland – *What I had*
Moody Gallery, May 9 – July 3, 2026
Exhibition Review by Elliot Penn

“What I had,” an exhibition of recent paintings and drawings by Dan Sutherland, opened at Moody Gallery on May 9, 2026. In addition to demonstrating his masterful technical abilities as a painter and ingenuity as a maker of drawings, the twenty-three works on view in this exhibition reflect Sutherland’s deep interest in and knowledge of art history. Sutherland references and melds art historical influences and sources from across centuries, from Jean Siméon Chardin to Alexander Calder and beyond, in an inventive and original manner. At times, particularly in his drawings, Sutherland explicitly appropriates motifs, tropes, and symbols from throughout the history of art. At other times, he more obliquely reveals his sources of inspiration through technique and approach. The results of Sutherlands efforts, a “game” of sorts according to the artist, constitute an unorthodox style that resists norms and simplistic, definitive categorization.



Dan Sutherland, *Open Plain*, 2025, oil on aluminum, 30 x 31 inches

Upon entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by *Open Plain* (2025), an oil on aluminum painting with curved edges, which hangs alone opposite the front door. *Open Plain* presents a furnished interior scene, a living room with windows, lamp, coffee table, and ceramics. This rationally cohesive interior fractures, fragments, and otherwise morphs into visually confounding blocks of color and patterned shapes. In some parts of the painting, most noticeably along the perimeter, Sutherland incorporates the color of the metal support into the composition. In *Open Plain*, Sutherland displays his artistic interest in ambiguity and in conveying something mysterious with precision and refinement. Commenting on his artistic process, Sutherland shares, “The paintings are built very organically. I don’t plan them per se, and so they kind of grow... The paintings are painted in layers, sometimes opaque, sometimes transparent, sometimes translucent, and the eventual color is a process of stacking and building.” As for his use of irregularly shaped supports, Sutherland clarifies, “I’m not planning the shape in relation to the image. I have a shape, I make my surfaces, and then I think about an image that I’m going to kind of play with on there...”



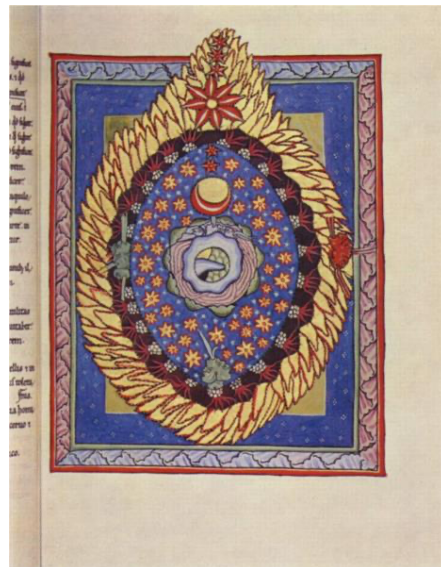
Dan Sutherland, *All Flames and Crust*, 2025, oil on wood, 16 1/2 x 12 inches

Dan Sutherland, *Mixed Fumes*, 2025, oil on wood, 13 1/2 x 12 inches

Dan Sutherland, *Star Stuffed*, 2025, oil on wood, 13 1/2 x 12 inches

Dan Sutherland, *Calamity Stripe*, 2025, oil on wood, 17 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches

The paintings in this show can be split into groups according to content and stylistic traits. *All Flames and Crust* (2025), *Mixed Fumes* (2025), *Calamity Stripe* (2025), and *Star Stuffed* (2025) belong to one group. They hang in a row of nine paintings on the gallery's main wall. These dynamic paintings, many of which have curved edges, evoke instead of directly describing. For example, in *All Flames and Crust*, Sutherland evokes the sensation of an all-consuming, fiery explosion. Sutherland forgoes explicit illusionistic elements in *All Flames and Crust*. Instead, the artist provides an elemental, highly abstracted impression of his subject. Pale pink and yellow bursts and stripes erupt from the center of the composition and transition to rich, warm reds, blues, and purples as they extend outwards. According to the artist, paintings like *All Flames and Crust* relate to "a history of illuminated manuscripts or ecstatic visions." Sutherland further explains, "The visions of St. Hildegard would be an example... I'm trying to talk about something large (or) cataclysmic."



Hildegard von Bingen, "The Universe" from the *Scivias*, c. 1165, manuscript illumination.
(Image Credit: The Yorck Project, 2002)

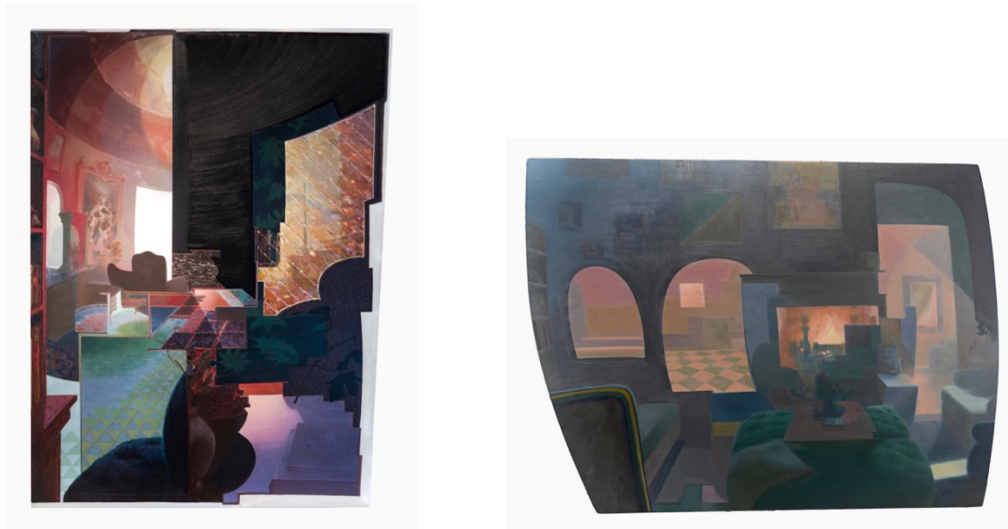
In *Mixed Fumes*, Sutherland fills the composition with delicately rendered smoke-like billows. Red and peach structures with jagged edges protrude from the rolling blue and green billows. *Star Stuffed*, as the title suggests, shows compactly arranged red stars with triangular points. This cluster of stars is outlined by a band of blue on three sides. The stars pucker and fold like buttons on upholstered furniture. Lastly, *Calamity Stripe* presents a cinematic, dynamic, bird's-eye perspective of an abyss-like structure. Without revealing the scene definitively, without describing a canyon or chasm from nature, Sutherland conveys

immense depth and space in *Calamity Stripe*. Nor does Sutherland rely on atmospheric painterly effects or immense scale to convey depth. Rather, through a process of responsive painting and revision, Sutherland utilizes both bold color relationships and the wonky shape of the painting to exaggerate and toy with perceived depth.



Dan Sutherland, *Hanging Fruit*, 2025, oil on wood, 13 1/2 x 12 inches
 Dan Sutherland, *Overt Lean*, 2025, oil on aluminum, 40 x 39 1/2 inches

Hanging Fruit (2025), *Looking Out Looking In* (2025), *Quadrant Growth* (2025), and *Overt Lean* (2025) constitute the second group, which is defined by a preoccupation with the visuals of the traditional still life genre. Sutherland conceives of these works as “abstractions masquerading as still lifes.” In these four paintings, Sutherland depicts foliage and flower-like forms. Allusions to vases appear in three of the four paintings. Artist Daniel Dove, commenting on related works by Sutherland, remarked in 2007, “It’s as if Sutherland creates subtly new species of flora and accords them behaviors equivalent, but not identical, to the familiar beings of our everyday world. To give these new species a place to grow, he invents strange hybrid spaces, equally built out of sensory experience and the stylizations from painting’s history.” This description still rings true today regarding *Hanging Fruit*, *Looking Out Looking In*, *Quadrant Growth*, and *Overt Lean*. Furthermore, the influence of Cubism is noticeable in these paintings. However, rather than depicting the visual information of a motif or scene from multiple vantage points to more fully or wholly express his perception of the subject as it exists in three-dimensions, revealing the totality of a subject by overcoming a singular perspective, Sutherland employs fragmented perspectives and geometric forms to perplex and mystify.



Dan Sutherland, *I lit*, 2025, oil on aluminum, 60 x 48 inches
 Dan Sutherland, *Cozy Through*, 2025, oil on wood, 15 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches

Open Plain, I lit (2025), *Cozy Through* (2025), and *Sideboard Potent* (2025) compose the third and final group of paintings in this show. According to Sutherland, in these works, “I’m integrating things that don’t belong together in the painting. And then, I hope, as you look at it, they become less and less possible as spaces to inhabit.” In *I lit*, Sutherland juxtaposes and interweaves various scenes, patterns, shapes, and spaces in a collage-like fashion. Like *Open Plain, I lit* presents an otherworldly construction that seems to exist in a state of flux, appearing like a transitory window or portal. The realistic interior scene on the left side of the compositions, which features a framed painting based on William-Adolphe Bouguereau’s *Alma Parens* (1883), transforms into geometric blocks of color, elaborate patterns, and carefully blended tonal transitions. Apart from *Open Plain*, the scenes of these paintings are rendered in an atmospheric haze, which adds to their mystery and allure. This atmospheric, dreamlike haze pervades the interior shown in *Cozy Through*, creating a sense of distance or unreachability between the viewer and the scene.

In addition to a single wall with nine small drawings, two monumental drawings are included in “What I had.” They hang opposite one another on the end walls of the gallery, providing ample space for both close and distant viewing. From afar, these two tonal drawings, entitled *Collection Trap* and *Dream Table in Part*, have a sleek, refined appearance. However, up-close, Sutherland’s energetic hand is unmistakable, as is his collage-like, three-dimensional way of combining pieces of paper. In contrast to his paintings, Sutherland’s drawings, especially those he collaged together, feel fragmentary, akin in effect to viewing a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle or a sherd of decorated ancient pottery.



Dan Sutherland, *Dream Table in Part*, 2026, graphite on paper, 67 x 53 inches



Dan Sutherland, *Collection Trap*, 2026, graphite on paper, 48 x 40 inches

In *Collection Trap*, Sutherland again presents an interior, this time a study. This study is packed with objects, a chandelier, books, artworks, and more. Calder-esque mobiles hang from the ceiling and framed paintings adorn the wall. Among these paintings is a still life that mimics the style of Giorgio Morandi. Small sculptures by Alberto Giacometti are displayed in the bookshelf. *Collection Trap* contains many historical quotations sourced from a diverse array of artists, from Pablo Picasso to Jan van Eyck. Even the lone female figure, whose partial reflection is shown in a mirror, is sourced from art history. However, rather than relating to a post-modern, tongue-in-cheek brand of appropriation, Sutherland's use of quotations harkens back to the collaboration between Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens, as well as the painters of salon halls overfilled with paintings in gilded frames. However, *Collection Trap* is not imbued with allegorical meaning or overt symbolism. Rather, *Collection Trap* demands that the viewer engage with its contents, to try to figure out what they amount to or suggest.

Having established that Sutherland's style probes the relationship between abstraction and illusionism, as well as wedges modernist and pre-modernist art historical traditions, techniques, and imagery, it is tempting to want to assign a label to his style. However, no combination of terms or hyphenated word seems capable of accurately capturing the nature of Sutherland's current painting and drawing, so filled with contradictions and imbued with ambiguity. Perhaps, it is this web of contradictions, the push and pull between abstract, organic, illusionistic, flat, and geometric, that defines Sutherland's style. As for the visitor's experience, studying the artworks on view in "What I had" is an engrossing and perplexing undertaking. If you are open to ambiguity, uncertainty, and being left with more questions than answers, "What I had" is a feast for the eyes and the mind.