

THESIS

STILL LIVES: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EVERYDAY

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### STILL LIFES: TRANSFORMATION OF THE EVERYDAY

What I find of particular interest is the transformation of the mundane. Through this series of still life paintings, I convey an acceptance of and love for everyday life -- life not characterized by memorable events, but by a sort of constant clutter that denotes human presence and communal living. I choose common objects (chairs, bowls, jewelry . . .) because of my emotional ties to the people they represent or their ability to access my memories. The result is an elevation of the ordinary to a place of value, through focused attention, rich coloration, sensuous textures, and exuberant brush stroke.

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## STILL LIFES: TRANSFORMATION OF THE EVERYDAY

Art is transformative in nature. A group of objects may be recorded by means of camera lens or paint brush and never transcend being just that -- a group of objects. Or they may be expanded beyond the realm of objectified forms, imbued with the peculiar vision and insight of the artist.

The successful conveyance of an artist's unique vision lies in the physical assembling of the material components of the work. The levels of personal meanings assigned by the artist must adequately create a bridge from the internal to the external. Because visual art at this point is nonverbal, the beauty, the mystery of human communication through sensate means is essential to my work.

My thesis comprises a series of still lifes which conveys, through common formal elements, an emotional reason for being. My usage of space, paint tactility, subject matter, placement, and color is the result of a visceral response to a memory or human relationship. This is the seed from which the paintings take life.

It is often only when the paintings are nearing completion that I realize what has moved me to choose certain objects and their arrangements. Certainly there are formal considerations, but more importantly there are personal attachments. It is the latter, which becomes my bridge into a physical translation. The emotional value of an object or grouping becomes my reason for communication. When that response is triggered, I want to express it. The expression takes its form in paint.

Many times I have found my daughter wearing her dad's striped robe. I well understand what is occurring. Through a personal object of his, she can feel him, smell him, be wrapped in his protection. It is intimate identification with another. Objects in my paintings are chosen in the same manner. They are intimately associated with people and memories. While some items have actually belonged to people I know, others *should* have.

The consistencies in the staging of these still lifes become significant. Each carries a symbolism easily understood. Tables bear differing messages whether barren or loaded (Martine Left Her Bowl, Plate I). They represent the condition of our spirits, our lives. "My plate is full." "My cup is empty." We all know what these mean. My tables are full -- full of objects, full of color, full of thick, juicy paint. The chairs represent the human being, mimicking its shape and posture (Belts, Red Shoe, and Skates in a Salmon Room, Plate IV). Dressers have compartments and depth, as does the human psyche (Friday Night, Plate XI). Decorative patterns are cultural creative expressions of humanity.

Contextually, the chairs, tables, and patterned material speak of actual people -- people with names, attitudes and habits. There are anecdotal moments here: someone just got up from breakfast (Breakfast Table With Hyacinth Pots, Plate V), a jacket is tossed over a chair (Nica's Cat Chair, Plate II), shoes, dress, and perfume wait to be put on (Seder Dancing Shoes, Plate VIII). These scenes represent common moments -- human moments presented with affection.

The paintings are large but perceived as intimate, for spaces are cropped to present slices of life rather than dioramas. They are infused with human presence, yet there is an absence of the figure. I push the scale close to a one-to-one ratio.

As such, the addition of the figure would be confrontive and prevent the viewer from entering the space. Instead, the paintings are invitations to come into my world. I like this. There is something generous, accessible, and familiar here.

The employment of color, texture, and drawing are a signature of my emotional response to the still life (Goody's Tablecloth, Plate VI). Local color is true while composed of intense, inventive broken color. There is a preference for acidic and jewel-like pigmentation. This, along with exuberant line, texture, and stroking, creates a lush sensuality.

What I find of particular interest is the transformation of the mundane. From the beginning, humans have taken functional objects and transformed them by craftsmanship and ornamentation. But here in America, we find a vernacular of taste and decor which is graceless and hopelessly "bad." Growing up in this garden of "corn," a tension emerges within me regarding this vernacular, as it often contrasts with a fine art aesthetic. At times this issue enters my work. If I can take a dull, gray rocker (the upholstery of the "never-die-I-wish-it-would-even-the cats-can't-destroy-it" variety) and make warm and friendly associations, then the rocker is transformed for me. The ugly becomes beautiful and rich. The rocker is, then, my friend who gave it to me from out of her basement bounty. It is also my wonderfully quirky grandma, who had everything covered in the same material (Nica's Cat Chair, Plate II).

In the same painting, the obnoxious floral wallpaper (an emblem to me of supreme American tastelessness) is now campy, funny, interesting. My criticism has been changed to a gentle, humorous embracing, accomplished, not by ignoring or deemphasizing that wall; rather, I allot special attention to those very



flowers by way of stroke, line, and strong color. Like the dancing hippos of "Fantasia," these behemoth flowers have attained a grace of their own, constructing a dynamic visual pattern (Detail, Nica's Cat Chair, Plate III).

Through this body of work, I convey an acceptance of and love for everyday life -- life not characterized by memorable events, but by the mundane, a sort of constant clutter that denotes human presence and communal living. And so I elevate the ordinary to a place of value through focused attention, stroke, texture, and celebratory color.

## PLATES



PLATE I: Martine Left Her Bowl  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 38" x 37"



PLATE II: Nica's Cat Chair  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 60" x 50"



PLATE III: Detail, Nica's Cat Chair  
11" x 6 1/2"





PLATE IV: Belts, Red Shoe and Skates in a Salmon Room  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 52" x 42"



PLATE V: Breakfast Table with Hyacinth Pots  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 46" x 40"



PLATE VI: Goody's Tablecloth  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 46" x 32"





PLATE VII: Peacock, Pitcher and Rachel's Bird on Plaid  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 44" x 32"



PLATE VIII: Seder Dancing Shoes  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas, 48" x 38"



PLATE IX: Saints  
Oil on canvas, 36" x 32"





PLATE X: Detail, Saints  
14 1/2" x 9"



PLATE XI: Friday Night  
Oil on canvas, 46" x 36"



PLATE XII: Detail, Friday Night  
13 1/2" x 8"