



BEAUTIFUL
OBJECT:

upsetting still life

CHRISTOPHER GALLEGO
DOUGLAS GOLDBERG
Nancy Grimes
EVEREST HALL
DENNIS KARDON
CHRISTIAN LITTLE
PATRICK NEAL
TREVOR WINKFIELD
ERIC WOLF

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Curated by Patrick Neal

JEFFREY LEDER GALLERY
2137 45th Road, Long Island City, NY 11101

(Front and back cover), Nancy Grimes, Pile of Hearts (detail), 2013, Conte crayon and charcoal on paper, 15½ x 23½ inches

Beautiful Object: Upsetting Still life

Last September, at Hollis Taggart Gallery in New York City, the art critic John Yau curated an exhibition titled "Painting is Not Doomed to Repeat Itself". That show, which featured a wide array of contemporary painting practices, grew out of Yau's frustration from hearing for decades that painting was in crisis or in a protracted state of dying.¹ But, contrary to such alarms, painters from all over the country, having been liberated from overbearing stylistic credos of past decades, were making innovative work in all sorts of ways.

Two of the painters Yau selected for his show, Joshua Marsh and Catherine Murphy, exhibited variations on still life painting, having been practitioners of this humble genre for years. Their paintings, embedded with tracings of different art historical styles, found surprising new ways to push still life forward into the 21st century. Looking at Marsh's and Murphy's compositions, it occurred to me that these two artists have not been alone in referencing still life; I know of many other artists who are doing the same thing in one way or another. In fact, at a time in the art world when idiosyncratic approaches appear to be favored over grand statements, one could argue that still life is still going strong. It continues to provide conceptual fodder for artists of all stripes.

For painters particularly interested in craft and the sophisticated spatial possibilities inherent to the medium of painting, the tableau of still life continues to fea-



Everest Hall, Monument, 2013, Oil on panel, 9 x12 inches

ture prominently in a college art education. Taking a broad view of art history, the still life genre, although sometimes regarded as marginal, has been a significant vehicle for the realization of many 20th century plastic and conceptual innovations. And now, in the second decade of the new millennium, the artist Lucy Somers has made a convincing case that the idiom of still life has even been subsumed into contemporary photography, installation and post studio practices.²

The question of what actually constitutes a still life, and the myriad forms it can take, are the subject and occasion for "Beautiful Object: Upsetting Still life", a show of contemporary still life painting and sculpture. To be sure, the usual fruits and crockery can be seen here, but for the nine artists in the exhibit, quotidian objects are often combined with elements of portraiture and landscape. Many of the artworks include objects chosen for their sensual or symbolic qualities, which are recontextualized in ways that confound any preconceived notions of what comprises a still life. Objects may be deliberately placed or arbitrarily strewn about; painted up-close from observation; invented outright; or else hybridized into altogether different forms. Still life paintings in "Beautiful Object" may be mediated with digital scrims and screens or assert a brute physicality. Some are paired with theatrical and literary impulses, taking years to reach resolution; others are completed in one daring session. What appears like a straightforward depiction of something familiar may, on closer inspection, reveal more poetic or ambivalent meanings.

Nancy Grimes, Everest Hall and Christian Little stage still life props with varying



Trevor Winkfield, Shake Me, I Rattle, 2009, Acrylic on linen, 12 x 12 inches



Christian Little, *Exhibitionists #9 (Shower)*, 2015, Acrylic on wood panel, 24 x 24 inches

degrees of theatricality, often with a melange of body parts thrown into the mix. The heart-shaped props that Grimes employs for her series of “Heart Paintings” are arranged in a way reminiscent of Poussin’s miniature stage sets. She manages to invest a subject as twee as a Valentine with a mortal gravity that speaks to the failings of the physical body and the broken hearts of human relationships. Hall composes intimate still lifes from small, personal objects like coins and feathers, combined with inkjet printed patterns and the paint-splattered scuffs and litter of his own studio. From these humble origins he creates allegories, vignettes of his own trysts and longings that connect to larger human mythologies, winding the tales of Zarathustra and Calypso into his personal narrative. Christian Little’s paintings harness his artisanal skills as a high-end decorative painter. Marrying the techniques of trompe l’oeil and faux finish to create images that reflect the surface and spectacle of a superficial society, he pieces together discombobulated painterly sections to depict broken people, displayed atop pedestals.

Douglas Goldberg and Christopher Gallego revitalize traditionally realist styles of painting and sculpture with an intimate and timeless sensibility. Gallego employs simple props to mine the creative possibilities where tangible thing becomes painterly illusion. The floors, walls, tools and props of his studio become extraordinary by means of a meditative, painterly process that relishes the abstract as much as the representational. Goldberg’s carved sculptures in marble, alabaster and agate depict small, mysterious objects obscured beneath draped cloth. Although highly rendered, these remain elusive and abstract, suggesting fragments of larger, more heroic, ceremonial sculpture. The suggestion of what is obscured

beneath the flowing drapery is as powerful as the lines and recesses of the sumptuously carved stone.

Eric Wolf's and Trevor Winkfield's artworks share a graphic flatness but otherwise couldn't be more different from one another. While Winkfield's paintings are zany and colorful, teeming with oddball thingamajigs, Wolf works in black in white with painterly swathes that resemble a minimal, Zen calligraphy. Both artists conjure up an array of visual associations that marry abstraction and figuration, and both have a pop sensibility that culls from a grab bag of past styles, propelling them into the present. In Winkfield's small, square paintings, we recognize parts of familiar items; a pen and pad or guitar, even if they are dressed up with ceremonial colors and flourished with majestic trimmings. Wolf works with black ink on paper to create drawings of a hoyo plant or scholar's rock that ripple and roil with a liquid fluidity. These still life motifs have an optic rhythm not so different from the painted landscapes of mountains and lakes that Wolf executes while directly in nature.

Collecting bits and pieces of discarded but sensual materials, both Dennis Kardon and I directly address the process and practice of painting itself. The oddly perverse vessels, fruits and pastries of Kardon's still lifes, materialize out of layers of gestural paint in ways that are fantastical and surreal. Kardon is interested in the distorting and transformative power of paint, and plays up this disorientation by drawing on the deceptive surfaces of ice crystals, aluminum foil and digital screens. In a somewhat related way, I have been working with street detritus and my own studio props and tools. Things that I traditionally arrange on a



Eric Wolf, Hoya, 2000, Ink on paper, 30 x 22 inches



Dennis Kardon, *The Family Orders*, 2004, Oil on linen, 24 x 30 inches

tabletop but proceed to throw, scatter, topple and tear. I consider the set ups as manifestations of the actual “guts” of a painting, where the physicality of the subject matter has a sensory parallel to the physical process of making the painting.

One of the last big overviews of still life was “Objects of Desire: The Modern Still life” which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in 1997. Although exhibiting some great works by Cezanne, Miro and Picasso, this show came under criticism for showcasing a predictable round-up of 20th century masters while ignoring many important, lesser known figures who have contributed to still life painting. Critics pointed out the omission of artists not sanctioned by the museum establishment who operated in a space not easily classifiable– figures like Morris Graves, Janet Fish or Giorgio Morandi. Mark Steven’s writing in *New York magazine* put it best when discussing the failure to not include even a single work by Wayne Thiebaud:

“It’s part of Thiebaud’s appeal that he is not easy to categorize. He could have made the a-team of Pop Art, for example, if only he had given up the luscious, painterly brushwork that some critics consider old-fashioned. He might then have adopted a cooler, more ironic surface, capturing the air of calculated pretense and shadowy “simulacra” that characterizes today’s culture. But I’m glad he stayed Thiebaud.”³

It is with this sentiment that I circle back to John Yau and his conviction that some artists will continue to work against the grain, pushing paint around in ways to cre-

ate new forms that fall between the cracks of codified art history. And it's in this spirit that I celebrate the artists in "Beautiful Object", a group who have carved out their own paths, necessitated by their own peculiar investigations into still life. One of the best descriptions of the alchemical nature of the painting medium that I've heard came from the artist Greg Drasler: "painting is an infinitely plastic medium that can absorb other mediums".⁴ The crudeness of what is essentially colored mud on a flat surface gives the medium its profound conceptual range. One could say as much about the open-ended simplicity of the still life genre, where a few personal objects sitting on a surface become grist for magical reinterpretation. In the hands of a clever artist, so much can be done with so little.

Patrick Neal,
March 2016,
New York City

Works Cited

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Nancy Grimes, Black Heart, 2015, Oil on linen, 20 x 24 inches



Christopher Gallego, Small Studio Jar, 2013, Oil on board, 13 x 8 inches



Douglas Goldberg, Painkillers, 2012, Italian agate, 10 x 6 x 6½ inches



Patrick Neal, Pink Scatter, 2015, Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

Christopher Gallego grew up in Glen Cove, NY. After earning his BA in 1982, he studied at the School of Visual Arts and the National Academy School of Fine Arts in New York. A partial list of exhibitions includes OK Harris Works of Art, Seraphin Gallery, the New Britain Museum of American Art, Hirschl and Adler Modern, the Arkansas Arts Center, the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and the Rockefeller Fund. He has received fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation, the Pollock Krasner Foundation and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. He was part of the jury panel for the 2013 Maryland Federation of Arts and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Douglas Goldberg was born in northern New Jersey and has been living and working in Brooklyn, NY since 1999. He has a BA in Fine Art from Messiah College and a MFA from Maryland Institute, College of Art's Mount Royal School. He has exhibited in several group shows in the Mid-Atlantic region and in some recent art fairs including Art Wynwood, Pulse Miami and Pulse New York. The most recent exhibitions include Waterhouse and Dodd in Manhattan, SUGAR in Bushwick, Radiator Gallery in LIC and the Laholm Drawing Museum in Laholm, Sweden.

Nancy Grimes Born in Indianapolis, Indiana. Grimes studied painting, drawing and art history at Indiana University in Bloomington, the University of Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago where she received an MFA. In 1980, Grimes moved to New York City, where she began exhibiting her art work and writing art reviews for periodicals such as ARTnews and Art in America. Her work was included in numerous group shows on the both the east and west coasts, and she has had solo shows in San Francisco, New Jersey and New York City. She has also written numerous catalog essays as well as a book on the under-known painter, Jared French. She currently teaches painting at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and lives in Astoria, Queens with her husband, William Grimes, and her four cats, Bettina, Blaise, Olive and Smudge.

Beautiful Object

In Love's Golden Ocean
No Emotion
Ooh
Fake A Smile For Charity
Cry In Trauma For The Drama
Oh No
Real Love A Golden Rarity
Beautiful Object
Ooh
I Hang Them From The Walls & Ceiling
What More Can I Do
I Want To Put My Hands Deep Into Feeling
Hands Only Get So Far
Depth For Me Is Just A Possibility
& All My Misguided Desire
Freezes Me Deep With Pent Up Hostility
What's The Meaning Of The Mask
You Can't Be Asked
Oh No
Is Life A Social Fiction
Not To See But Be Seen
Oh Oh
Now That's A Ghost's Ambition
Beautiful Object
Ooh
As If A Pretty Face Is So Revealing
Hey What Can I Do
If What I've Got Isn't As Appealing
Beautiful Object
Ooh
Soul Is Sold To Portray A Perfection
A Beautiful Object True
It's Just A Parody Of A Person

by Glass Candy

Writer(s): John Padgett, Lori Monahan
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Everest Hall lives and works in New York City. He has an MFA in painting from Yale School of Art and a BFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Hall has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1997. Recently he has been included in group exhibitions at the Laholm Drawing Museum in Sweden, Susan Inglett Gallery, Richard Gray and DCKT Contemporary in New York.

Dennis Kardon holds a B.A. from Yale. He has shown extensively in New York City and throughout the world. NYC exhibitions include the Drawing Center, Barbara Toll Fine Art, Mitchell Alpus Gallery and the Jewish Museum. Kardon has received a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant, a Milton Avery fellowship to Yaddo artist colony, and a John Simon Memorial Guggenheim Fellowship. Kardon's own writing and art reviews have been featured in Art in America, Artcritical.com, Artnet.com and The Brooklyn Rail. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum among many others. He currently teaches at the school of Visual Arts in New York.

Christian Little was born in Southampton, NY and currently lives and works in Kingston, NY. He earned his BFA ('05) and MFA ('15) in Painting/Drawing from SUNY New Paltz. Some of his group shows include exhibitions at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Projects in Long Island City and Kingston Museum of Contemporary Art in Kingston, NY. Recent solo shows have been at The Silent Barn in Bushwick, Sara Nightingale Gallery in Watermill, NY and Hewn Arts Center in Jersey City, NJ. Mr. Little's work has been exhibited in international art fairs such as Fountain, ArtMRKT, Aqua and Spring/Break.

"How does the ground below me experience my body as an object. The pressure of my weight the softness of my flesh, dampness of cold cement and hazy sky above. I am the nearest object to myself and my greatest mystery." —Everest Hall

"Everything becomes a still life once it's fixed on a canvas, trapped in its weave. Even a running foot can now be forever, and tulips so caught never die. Of course not!" —Trevor Winkfield

<Everest Hall, As above so below (detail), 2016, Oil on panel, 11 x14 inches

Patrick Neal was born in Waterford, NY and has lived in NYC since 1989. He attended The College of Saint Rose, Skowhegan School of Art, and has an MFA from Yale. Some of his group shows include Alpha Gallery in Boston and Eagle Studio, The Painting Center, Jeffrey Leder, David Beitzel, White Columns, Moe's Meat Market and SBM Gallery in New York. Recent solo shows have been at the Chocolate Factory in Long Island City and the Italian Academy at Columbia University. He's received Vogelstein and Ingram Merrill Grants and is a contributing arts writer for Hyperallergic blogazine.

Trevor Winkfield lives in Manhattan, where his paintings are represented by Tibor de Nagy. Two exhibitions last year highlighted his collaborations with poets and writers (at the Poetry Foundation in Chicago, and Poets House in New York). His interviews with Miles Champion, "How I Became A Painter" were published in 2014, as were his art writings under the title "Georges Braque & Others".

Eric Wolf holds a BFA from The Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from City College, NYC. He has attended The Skowhegan School and has been awarded other residencies at Art Omi, The Blue Mountain Center, The Mac Dowell Colony, Yaddo, and Foundation Claude Monet in Giverny, France. Group and solo exhibitions include Jeff Bailey Gallery, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Fredericks Freiser, Paul Morris Gallery, Caren Golden, Danese, Daniel Weinberg, Moti Hasson, Salon 94, Barbara Gladstone and The Drawing Center. Notable shows outside of New York include the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC, The Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH, and Musee Marmottan Monet, Paris, France. Wolf's work has been reviewed by The New York Times, Art in America, ArtNews, Artforum, and The New Yorker.



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