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Poetical Fire: Three Centuries of Still Lifes

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POETICAL FIRE

Three Centuries of Still Lives

SHELDON MUSEUM OF ART

This project is dedicated to Jane and Carl Rohman,
whose longtime support of Sheldon and generous gifts from their collection
made *Poetical Fire* possible.

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POETICAL FIRE

Three Centuries of Still Lives



SHELDON MUSEUM OF ART

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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FOREWORD: THE FRUITS OF READING A GENRE

Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Director

By their fruits ye shall know them.

Matthew 7:16

Matthew, it seems, was a pragmatist. In reading fruit as if it disclosed the private identity of trees, he invites us to read the effects of things in order to understand what motivates the appearance of those effects. Matthew of course wasn't really concerned with fruit but with moral character and its discernment. We can extrapolate from his method of judging character a general form of discerning, a form of reading concerned with the rhetorical effect of things, allowing us to make claims and judgments about their significance.

In reading for effects we look for the impact things have on us, quite aside from looking at the things themselves. In the process, we learn something about these things and consequently how to make judgments concerning them. With rhetorical reading, we look at the persuasion at work in things—how they make us feel—to gain a sense of how we assign meanings to them.

For instance, things like fruits: they abound in our exhibition and in the book at hand because they populate so many still lifes. They appear in seventeen of the twenty-five paintings represented in this volume. Because of this sheer abundance—a cumulative *effect* we register—we may feel that still lifes articulate their charge as a genre through the fruit they offer and, furthermore, that they do so even when no fruit is present. That is, even as fruit can stand for something else (as in Matthew's metaphor for character), other objects appearing in still lifes may operate in the same way.

In still lifes devoid of fruit, objects may yet stand metaphorically for the absent fruit; in fact, they permit its absence, giving it a reprieve from duty. Fruits in still lifes function both as an offering of something sweet and as a reminder of imminent decay. Whether or not fruit appears in a composition, it nevertheless provides still lifes with their central rhetorical device. This device, or *fruit function*, as we may dub it, haunts the genre as an *effect* produced in both displaying a prize and offering a cautionary tale. Even an empty bowl retains the promise of fruit.

Opposite: Kira Greene (American, born Korea, 1964). *Archway to Happiness*, 2009 (detail). Color pencil and gouache on wood panel; 91.4 x 91.4 cm [36 x 36 in.]. UNL-Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust, U-5607.

The collection, exhibition, study, and illustration of still lifes compose the project we call *Poetical Fire: Three Centuries of Still Lives*. In the following pages, six essays explore and read the works in the exhibition. These introductory words on reading, on the other hand, are about the still-life genre itself and the associational value of words, such as *fruit*, as much as the effect of images. This little review of rhetorical effects provides a brief keyhole-scale peek at this discursive affair.

Fruit has a rhetoric of its own, as metaphor and symbol, imbuing still lifes with added value. Herodotus, for example, once said that all men's gains are the fruit of venturing. Fruit, according to his wisdom, served as the reward of venturing—or its spoils, depending on the nature of the venture, we might add.

Similarly Sir Walter Scott once said that he who climbs the tall tree has won right to the fruit. Scott thought of fruit as emblematic of nature's reward for conquest, as something to be plucked by those who take the trouble to conquer nature. Fruit represents bounty. In Scott's formulation fruit provides a figure for extending natural rights beyond the self—a form of Darwinism, instrumentalized outward. What I pluck from nature is mine by right, my property. A nation, a people, a continent, may each in turn fall to conquest, once imagined as an extension of nature. Fruit, whether actual or figurative, conveys a conquest.

These readings of the rhetoric of fruit may be confirmed by recalling the historical contexts surrounding still-life painting. Consider, for instance, the temporal context of the sixteenth century, when colonialism, imperialism, mercantilism, and, hence, capitalism, all grew up together. Their values and accomplishments—a triangulation of nationalism, consumption, and exoticism—found reflection and advocacy in that century's painting, especially in still life, a newly consolidated genre inspired by the very *fruits* of these new conquests.

Art has always endorsed the values of its times, be they political, spiritual, or economic; these forces have also supplied the underpinning and meaning of patronage. Civilization depends on art to validate itself and its authority. Because of this power of art, this effect, some artists use art to challenge prevailing worldviews or offer alternate ones.

All paintings have a rhetoric. Of what, we ask, are they trying to persuade us? In teasing out the rhetoric of the still-life genre, we might also inquire about what still lifes convey or conjure. They remind us, on occasion, of a kitchen, a pantry, a dinner table. These we associate with the domestic realm of provisions and service or of a social class characterized by manners and cultivation. On other occasions we find a rifle, a knife, or dead game, which we associate with the wilderness realm of the hunter and provider. Gender effects follow close behind.

We should ask what promises are implied by such still lifes. Albert Einstein captured this promise in his remark that a table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin are all that one needs to be happy. Happiness attends the promise of still lifes. Does this traditional rhetoric hold today? Kira Greene's recent painting (page 4) provides an arch interpretation of the still-life genre and the promises it makes. The pun in the title, *Archway to Happiness*, may or may not be her intention, but it supports a reading of the work as satirically commenting on the very rhetoric of the genre. It also foregrounds the transnational nature of still lifes, carrying allusions to Celtic, Moorish, and pan-Asian cultures.

From the museum standpoint, still lifes conjure what we do. Here they perform what this exhibition and catalogue deliver: an offering and a showing of what we, the Sheldon Museum, possess and proudly share with our audiences. In this context, a still life offers a microcosm of a museum in the presentation of its collection, its riches, its cache.

Since Zeuxis's famous painting of trompe-l'oeil grapes in ancient Greece, through the works of the eighteenth-century master Jean-Baptiste-Siméon-Chardin, to Jasper Johns's jam-begging slice of toast (page 50) and Emily Eveleth's jelly-oozing doughnut (page 58), fruit has defined the still-life genre. Fruit proffers the promises of seeds, fertility, future harvest, the future itself. In these, we are reminded that the fruit function coincides with the womb function in plants. So for all our divergence and extrapolation from Matthew's reading method, we come to the same conclusion about still lifes as he did about character—*that by their fruits ye shall know them*.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Brandon K. Ruud, Curator of Transnational American Art

Poetical Fire and the exhibition it accompanies were made possible by a number of dedicated Sheldon staff members, all of who brought their own talents to the project. Curatorial Assistant Sarah Feit managed many aspects of the catalogue and exhibition with great efficiency and finesse, and along with intern Jaclyn Siemers, ably and enthusiastically researched many of the artists and objects. Collections Manager Stacey Walsh supervised incoming loans, while Associate Registrar Genevieve Ellerbee coordinated new acquisitions as well as the conservation of several important canvases, which were beautifully and expertly treated by Kenneth Bé, head of the Paintings Conservation Laboratory at Omaha's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center. The exhibition was elegantly and skillfully installed by Senior Exhibition Technician Edson Rumbaugh, assisted by David Harvey and Laura Mohr, who also lent her considerable skills to imaging the artworks and preparing them for display. Curator of Education and Publications Gregory Nosan brought his usual attention to detail and flair for both content and style to the editing and production processes, and James Wawrzewski, Creative Director at Ludlow6, created a beautiful and striking design for the catalogue. Public Relations and Marketing Manager Sarah Baker-Hansen, Director of Education Karen Janovy, and Development Director Laura Reznicek, all made important contributions, and Sheldon's director, Jorge Daniel Veneciano, brought great enthusiasm to the project, tirelessly supporting every facet of both exhibition and publication.

I am grateful for the assistance and encouragement of all these people, as well as those in and outside the University of Nebraska–Lincoln community. A special thank you goes to Harley and Terri Schragger and Janet L. Farber of the Phil Schragger Collection in Omaha for graciously lending artwork. In addition, I owe a great debt of thanks to my fellow authors: Janet Farber, Director of the Schragger Collection; Randall R. Griffey, Curator of American Art at the Mead Art Museum, Amherst College; and Wendy J. Katz, Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Each of these scholars brought a wealth of insight and knowledge to their essays, making the catalogue and exhibition fuller, richer, and more stimulating. Finally, special appreciation from the entire Sheldon staff goes to Jane and Carl Rohman, whose donation of many still-life paintings to the collection made this exhibition possible, and to Ann Rawley, who generously provided financial support for the catalogue's publication. Thank you.

Opposite: Elizabeth Okie Paxton. *At Auction*, undated. Detail: see page 26.



THE REPUBLIC OF FRUIT: NATIONALISM AND STILL-LIFE PAINTING

Wendy J. Katz

And when [Americans] do become a fruit-eating, wine-drinking, music-loving nation, then they will produce things worth talking about!

Walt Whitman, October 29, 1891

In American art before the Civil War, it is not hard to find expressions of what has come to be called cultural nationalism. Amidst a market dominated by British imports, critics and patrons promoted native artists and encouraged the creation of works that, by expressing or debating beliefs about public behavior, national identity, and political conflicts, appeared uniquely American. But if marks of nationalism have been found in landscapes celebrating the sublimity of the Rockies, in genre scenes of Missouri boatmen, or even in the almost industrial output of portraits of George Washington, the role of canvases like Carducius Plantagenet Ream's *Still Life (Peaches and Grapes)* (fig. 1), with its depiction of natural abundance, has not been much considered.

Observers at the time, however, did indeed regard food and its arrangement at the table or market as one of the telltale signs of civilization's progress, and thus a measure of national greatness. European and British social commentators from Tocqueville to Dickens came to the United States to evaluate American democracy in explicit comparison to European models and achievements. The most successful of these were often those who scandalized their American audiences by condemning the new republic on the grounds that its politics had led to a degradation of culture. Fanny Trollope, an English writer and mother of the novelist Anthony Trollope, is typical. Here is her 1832 characterization of the democratic aspect of American life as represented by food customs: "The necessities of life, that is to say, meat, bread, butter, tea, and coffee, (not to mention whiskey), are within the reach of every sober, industrious, and healthy man."¹ This material abundance was visible as a different sort of excess among the upper classes, too: at tea in a mansion, the American ladies took "tea, coffee, hot cake and custard, hoe cake, john(nly) cake, waffle cake, and dodger cake, pickled peaches, and preserved cucumbers, ham, turkey, hung beef, apple sauce and [more] pickled oysters than ever were prepared in any other country of the

The epigraph is taken from Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, ed. Jeanne Chapman and Robert Maclsaac (Oregon House, Calif.: W. L. Bentley, 1996), vol. 9: 92. Also available at whitmanarchive.org.

¹ Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 4th ed. (1832; repr., Forgotten Books): 104–05, 66, 36–37.

Opposite: John F. Francis. *Still Life*, 1850. Detail; see page 14.

known world.” But this indiscriminating plentitude and cheapness was no compensation for the well-bred Trollope, who was forced to dine with servants and shopkeepers, horse traders and men in their shirtsleeves.

Americans thus had wild abundance but no delicacy; in complaints that were reiterated by genteel writers over the next several decades, Trollope criticized families for eating too much meat, mixing foods into incongruous combinations, displaying no skill with sauces or complex dishes, and always insisting on dessert. Thus, American taste was, to critical European and upper-class eyes, essentially the product of a crude desire to display and consume wealth in the most literal and even saccharine fashion. Even if Americans objected to Trollope’s judgment that dessert mattered in determining one’s degree of refinement, she also made an observation that many shoppers and gardeners would have had to agree with: “The luxury of fruits . . . are very inferior to any I have seen in Europe.”² Fruit, then, was a rarity—often, like currants or citruses, needing to be imported—and the fear was that Americans not only had no “native” fruits able to compete with European varieties in size and taste, but that even worse, fruits brought from Europe and Asia and grown in American soil actually degenerated.

The association of fruit with national taste, character, and potential was also one that Americans themselves participated in and reshaped on their own terms. Democratic politicians, for example, suffered from the accusation that they hankered after the trappings of royalty but possessed a taste that was formed by pure greed rather than by knowledge of proper distinctions. In 1840 the Whig congressman Charles Ogle lambasted the lifestyle of President Martin van Buren, Democratic heir to Andrew Jackson’s “Age of the Common Man.” Van Buren, an amateur horticulturist, was painted as an extravagant and licentious aristocrat who overindulged in fruit. Ogle’s accusations about Van Buren’s lascivious view of nature and exotic, foreign tastes focused on the White House dining room, with its “gilt plateaus, gaudy artificial flowers, rich blue and gold bonbons, tambours, compotiers, ice-cream vases, splendid French China vases, olive boats, octagon bowls, silver tureens, boats, and baskets, of very rich work, golden goblets, table spoons, knives and forks, &c.”³ His desserts, of course, consisted of “*Fruits, et glace en pyramide, et en petits moules*” followed by champagne. Ogle’s point is clear: by introducing aristocratic gewgaws and foods into the house of the American people, the president threatened to corrupt their plain, egalitarian manners. Although this was very much a partisan battle between Ogle’s Whigs (associated with the commercial and banking elite) and Van Buren’s Democrats (linked with farmers and immigrants), it nevertheless emphasizes how fruit potentially symbolized both elite and base tastes.

2 Ibid., 66–67. Travelers sympathetic to American republican institutions tended to instead praise the fruit and vegetables they encountered; see also Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 7–8.

3 Charles Ogle, “The Speech of Mr. Ogle, of Pennsylvania, on The Regal Splendor of the President’s Palace,” 1840; repr., *White House History* 10 (Winter 2002): 227–89, 40, 44.



Figure 1. Carducius Plantagenet Ream (American, 1837–1917). *Still Life (Peaches and Grapes)*, undated. Oil on canvas; 41.9 x 20.5 cm (16 ½ x 20 ½ in.). UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5578.



Figure 2. John F. Francis (American, 1808–1886). *Still Life*, 1850. Oil on canvas; 51.4 x 61 cm (20 1/4 x 24 in.). NAA–Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-123.

That so many nineteenth-century still lifes are preoccupied with fruit and dessert suggests that the genre was part of the cultural nationalist effort to establish a positive, indigenous model of American taste. Many artists accordingly endowed expensive foreign fruits with a healthy republican character or arranged them in a fashion that offers a balance between the effete and aristocratic, the plain and plentiful. For example, in John F. Francis's *Still Life* (fig. 2), one of the artist's earliest known attempts at the genre, fruits of several kinds spill toward the viewer onto a creased tablecloth. The central dish is mounded symmetrically, as would be expected for a fine table. Throughout the century, the standard recommendation for such arrangements was to create a pyramid with the help of pedestals or footed dishes to give additional height. Here the topmost peach has been removed, though its place is visually supplied by the bold central melon towering above and behind it. The melon's concentric radial design is emphasized by the concentrated dark green color near the stem, which hints that it is perhaps not quite ripe. Francis also broke with the dinner table's strict geometric order in favor of a somewhat looser arrangement. A few peaches are scattered outside and to the left of the dish, with one enticingly close to the table's edge. All these round rosy yellow spheres are balanced by the oblong green pears, whose shapes are in turn echoed by the semispheres of melons with their oblong, yellow seeds exposed. The lighting creates strong, shiny highlights on the pears and seeds, while the melons' striations and indentations reinforce the viewer's awareness of the painting's formal, rhythmic composition as much as its tactile illusions.

In the context of the debate over the merits of the fruits of American democracy, Francis's still life takes on a meaning beyond its value as a formal composition or display of painterly skill. For instance, the artist eschewed the most common American fruit, the apple—which was easy to store over winter and widely sold by street vendors—in favor of the peach, perhaps in order to introduce precisely the quality of luxuriousness that concerned both Ogle (as potentially corrupting Americans) and Trollope (its absence indicting democracy). The peach's native lineage almost rivaled the apple; introduced by the Spanish, peach orchards had become abundant among Native Americans. In a humorous essay of 1850, Andrew Jackson Downing, one of the foremost horticulturists of the century, envisioned a convention of native and foreign fruits held in a hall whose grand dome was ribbed like a melon; the president of the society was a Boston Russet apple but the secretary was Honest John Peach.⁴

In Francis's painted convention of fruit, the pears to the right echo the position Downing gave them: they were a "tall, aristocratic set of gentlemen and ladies—many of them foreigners, and most of them of French origin." Fewer in number in both this picture and in the orchard, European pears had been difficult for American nurserymen to grow; the differences in

⁴ Andrew Jackson Downing, "Fruits in Convention," *Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* 4, 3 (Feb. 1850): 345–51. On cultural nationalism, nativism, and horticulture, including a discussion of Downing and this article, see Philip J. Pauty, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 51–79. Francis's peaches are not the common wild peaches often fed to hogs, but a larger type like the Crawford, crossbred with more recent European varieties and grown by commercial orchards for the table.

climate wreaked havoc on them and suggested, worryingly, that the New World could not produce as noble a fruit as the Old. That an elegant example like the pear should not thrive in a democratic environment might not have been surprising, but still, the desire was to naturalize, improve, and adapt it, perhaps through crossbreeding with successful fruits such as the quince. Their delicacy nevertheless gave pears a kinship with peaches, a “native” fruit that Downing nevertheless satirized as effeminate, with their soft complexions and fine figures, or like youths with the soft down of early manhood and honied expressions, the sort likely to wind up in flirtations with the worthless French almond.⁵

Upright melons, in contrast, were imagined to reinforce the masculine vigor of the cultivated American table. With its exotic Persian name, the ribbed muskmelon was not felt to be as distinctively indigenous as the watermelon, but it had flourished long enough to establish a native pedigree. And as importantly, whereas in England it had to be grown in a greenhouse, in many regions of the United States, it could be cultivated outdoors. Francis’s powerful, hard-rinded melons frame the smoother, more feminine peaches and pears in what perhaps suggests a desirably mixed American character, balanced between the exclusive and the vulgar, the native and the foreign, the rare and the abundant. If this idea that fruit represents an ideal of national character seems farfetched, one might consider the toast at a Massachusetts Horticultural Society event in 1845: “To Horticulture and Mental Culture, The one the Cause, the other, the effect.” Furthermore, as a senator at a later horticultural exhibition argued, fruit was “a Republican Fine Art,” and Americans might actually be able to regenerate the exhausted “vegetable races” of the world.⁶

Francis is best known for his luncheon still lifes, in which fruit is accompanied by a full array of dishes, cakes, and wines, and came to be increasingly removed from arguments about native American nature. But other artists continued to push for republican fruit. Levi Wells Prentice was from the following generation, but his *Still Life with Apples and Cantaloupe* (fig. 3) seems to make a similar statement—although he dropped the aristocratic foreign pears entirely and added the even more prosaic touch of a paper market bag. Compared to Francis’s more painterly style, Prentice’s sharp forms, dark outlines, and brilliant colors are almost aggressive in their intensity. The apples are doubled through reflection, spilling and pushing against each other, stems waving; pouring out from the common paper bag is an energetic, high-keyed arrangement that almost overwhelms the stately, cooler architecture of the melon. Prentice’s fruit may be well described—as it was by a contemporary critic—as “huckster’s fruit,” clearly fresh from the market and filled with the plebeian upswelling of energy that might imply.⁷

5 Downing, 345, 350. On efforts to combine the pear with the quince and peach, see U. P. Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950): 237.

6 Joseph Breck, Senator Robert C. Winthrop (1848), and Andrew Jackson Downing (1847), quoted in Tamara Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785–1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 168–70.

7 James Jackson Jarves in 1864, in regard to George H. Hall, quoted in William H. Gerds and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1971): 182. Hall helped establish popular paintings of fruit spilling out of an overturned basket, which he sold in batches at auctions for high prices at mid-century.



Figure 3. Levi Wells Prentice (American, 1851–1935). *Still Life with Apples and Cantaloupe*, undated. Oil on canvas; 30.5 x 45.7 cm (12 x 18 in.). UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5564.



Figure 4. Artist unknown. *Still Life with Strawberries*, undated. Oil on canvas; 35.6 x 50.8 cm (14 x 20 in.). UNL-Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5562.

The same element of the bag—and its cousin, the unpretentious market basket—appears in the Sheldon’s *Still Life with Strawberries* (fig. 4); the anonymity of the artist seems appropriate, given the commonality of the motif. This work recalls still lifes of fruit spilling from a basket or a hat onto the grass in that its containers are equally prosaic affairs; in outdoor scenes, however, the emphasis is more on harvesting the fruit fresh in the countryside. Fruit wrapped in a paper bag suggests instead the market shopper who brings home her prize. Here the berries spill out, revealing that those under the top layer are not quite ripe.

In shifting from Francis’s dining table to Prentice’s market basket to the unknown artist’s fruit in the bag, the old critique of an unripe American culture emerges in a new guise. Its emblem might well be the strawberry. Trollope had been shocked by the costliness and rarity of strawberries in the United States, which she saw as yet another example of the failure of democracy to bring forth rich fruit. Nor did a European hybrid, despite being part Virginian, thrive. But after the middle of the century, a variety that was small and reliable, if less flavorful than its predecessors, became ubiquitous. The dominance of this “strongly republican fruit” was, however, made possible not by cultivating nature, but by the railroad and the refrigerated car. On one June night in 1847, a single train brought eighty thousand baskets of strawberries to New York City, signaling a commercial cornucopia available to all pocketbooks; this was due in part to a growing season that was extended from one month in 1815 to four by 1865.⁸ If Trollope and other reformers—American artists included—disliked the way in which the nation’s abundance served as a crude, insufficiently discriminating register for culture, it is not surprising that after mid-century many painters started to reject the dining table, with its ties to market production. Instead, they painted apples, berries, grapes, peaches, and plums that had fallen on the orchard grass or were still on the branch. In a country where urban markets had turned rich desserts into standardized commodities, wilder fruit, seemingly untouched by the refined demands of the marketplace, became more desirable.

Yet the labor of painting, the art of arranging a still life, was itself labor in the service of subduing—or, as the nineteenth century preferred to think of it, cultivating—nature. American artists typically preferred to make this labor scarcely noticeable on the painted surfaces of their works, as if they were presenting nature artlessly. This illusionism only emphasized human control and ordering of nature, and it, as much as their choice of fruits, was meant to deliver the final *coup d’oeil*: a tempting, and in its very accessibility, utterly American, style of abundance.

⁸ *Gardeners Monthly* [1861], quoted in Pauly, 73; on the competition to create a hybrid, see 70–73; Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food: The Rise of Urban America* (1940; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970): 59.



TRUTH TO NATURE: STILL LIFE, EXOTICISM, AND GENDER

Brandon K. Ruud

Martin Johnson Heade, an artist adept at painting both landscapes and still lifes, likely completed Sheldon's superb *Orange and Orange Blossoms* (fig. 1) sometime after his move to Florida in 1883. He first experimented with the genre, however, after an 1863 expedition to Brazil, and the resulting canvases feature large, colorful orchids in natural settings populated with small hummingbirds; these works are often described as containing both erotic and exotic elements.¹ By contrast, the Sheldon's picture shows a branch of freshly plucked oranges, blossoms intact, displayed on a wood table lined with purple velvet. This piece of flora reads more like a hothouse specimen prized for its decorative qualities than the subject of a botanical study. The contradiction between Heade's two distinctive types of painting—the scientific-based depictions of orchids on the one hand and the pleasing, ornamental fruit and flower themes on the other—points to larger issues churning below the surface of the still-life genre, issues that involve tensions between aestheticism and science, masculinity and femininity, exoticism and nativism.

A painting that embodies several of these concerns is Severin Roesen's *Still Life with Fruit and Champagne Glass* (fig. 2), created around 1872. Typical of the artist's work in this genre, it is a meticulously rendered, highly detailed catalogue of different fruits and luxury items. A large bowl in the center background offers peaches, pears, and a stray plum that punctuate a wide array of grapes whose broken branches, sinuous vines, and varicolored leaves denote different degrees of maturity and suggest that they have just been harvested. Before this assortment sits a smaller ornamental silver dish bursting with strawberries; to the right is a scattering of peaches, pears, plums, an apple, some picked and eaten currants, and yet more grapes that cascade off the thick, violet-gray marble table. At far left sits a white plate holding peaches, a branch of blackberries, half a lemon, and another cluster of grapes—not to mention their symbolic product, a bubbling glass of champagne.

At first glance, this rich cornucopia seems to reinforce the nation's identity as an American Eden with bountiful harvests that suggest divine blessings. At the same time, however, both Roesen's subjects and style denote a taste for the exotic and foreign. Among the

¹ William H. Gerds, "Introduction," in John V. Brindle and Sally Secrist, *American Cornucopia: 19th-Century Still Lifes and Studies*, exh. cat. (Pittsburgh: Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie Mellon University, 1976): 8.

Opposite: Severin Roesen. *Still Life with Fruit and Champagne Glass*, c. 1872. Detail; see page 23.

delicious inventory of fruits on display, none—with the exception of wild grapes—could be accurately thought indigenous to North America. During the nineteenth century, debates about what defined local and native (as opposed to exotic and imported) occupied the attention of cultivated, educated botanists and collectors—the patrons of Roesen’s paintings. Pears, for example, required careful tending and were considered an upper-class fruit, derided by some as “foreign and pompous.”² In the decades following the Civil War, strawberries, which were regarded as an expensive luxury item early in the century, became “an international symbol of America’s bounty” due to inexpensive seedlings and indiscriminate crossbreeding.³ Green table grapes were the result of deliberate conservatory care and greenhouse gardening, and the transformation of wine grapes into champagne became a symbol not only of imported indulgences, but also of mastery over the natural environment. Both were part of a complex, cosmopolitan economy in which exotic foods were cultivated and imported in the service of global trade.⁴

Perhaps more subtly, Roesen’s artistic approach and biography also reinforce the exotic abundance on display in his painting. German-born, the artist may have trained at the Düsseldorf Academy, a popular school that advocated finely detailed, highly finished yet fanciful paintings. He also may have gained experience as a porcelain painter in Cologne before joining the wave of Europeans who immigrated to the United States in 1848, ostensibly to evade revolutionary fervor in their homelands.⁵ The imported Düsseldorf style and Roesen’s European technique, itself based on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch and German still lifes, only enhances the foreign produce and posh possessions like the champagne flute and marble slab on parade in the Sheldon’s picture. What’s more, the work’s hermetic, nearly suffocating interior evokes the very hothouses in which Roesen’s vegetal subjects were grown and tended.

The artist’s contemporaries admired Roesen’s paintings precisely for their “truth to nature,” for detailed and meticulously rendered subjects that reveal an appreciation of the “Linnaean perception of universal order,” which is to say, an unchanging, divinely inspired arrangement of species. However, the fruits’ stylized quality and their placement in an interior on an expensive marble tabletop put them at odds with the naturalness advocated by mid-century artistic reformers such as John Ruskin.⁶

² Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007): 68–69.

³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴ For a similar reading of a still-life painting by Robert Spear Dunning, see Peter John Brownlee, *Manifest Destiny/Manifest Responsibility: Environmentalism and the Art of the American Landscape* (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art/Loyola University Museum of Art, 2008): 25.

⁵ For these details, see William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1971): 61, and William H. Gerdts, “A Still Life by Severin Roesen,” *Register of the Museum of Art* 5, 3 (University of Kansas, 1976).

⁶ For this quote, and a review of these arguments, see Ella M. Foshay, “Charles Darwin and the Development of American Flower Imagery,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, 4 (Winter 1980): 305; see also William H. Gerdts, “The Influence of Ruskin and Pre-Raphaelites on American Still-Life Painting,” *American Art Journal* 1, 2 (Autumn 1969): 89.



Figure 1. Martin Johnson Heade (American, 1819–1904). *Orange and Orange Blossoms*, 1883/95. Oil on canvas; 31.1 x 50.2 cm (12 ¼ x 19 ¾ in.). UNL–In loving memory of Beatrice D. Rohman by Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-4661.



Figure 2. Severin Roesen (American, born Germany, c. 1815–1872). *Still Life with Fruit and Champagne Glass*, c. 1872. Oil on canvas; 69.2 x 89.5 cm (27 ¼ x 35 ¼ in.). NAA–Gift of Carl Rohman in memory of Lorraine LeMar Rohman, N-686.

In contrast, Andrew John Henry Way's painting *Wild Grapes* (fig. 3) places a greater emphasis on the way in which still-life elements relate to nature, not culture. Like Roesen, Way paid great attention to the individual details of his composition, depicting with exactitude the fruits' varying sizes and states of maturity. Light pierces or bounces off each individual piece, reveling nuances of color, while the faded, curling leaves seductively hint at the grapes' ripeness and succulence. The artist set these elements against a stone column that is at once a mark of civilization and also, perhaps, a gravestone, an additional reminder of the cycle of life. His depiction of the fruits directly on the vine suggests the "reverential faith in Nature" espoused by Ruskin and his Pre-Raphaelite followers.⁷ The distinction between Roesen's structured interior and Way's natural setting points to the very essence of the former's exoticism: his still lifes are placed indoors and thus divorced from nature, thereby suggesting and reinforcing their separateness from it. The fact that Roesen's diverse arrangement contains fruits that could not possibly be in season at the same time is further confirmation of its very artificiality.

Both artists' love of verisimilitude and adherence to Linnaean principles respond to period notions about gender and its relation to still-life paintings generally. While Roesen's attention to detail and craftsmanship may have its roots in scientific inquiry, still life was at the bottom of the art-historical pecking order of subjects and was thought to be less intellectual than history or portrait painting, for example. In other words, it was imagined to be a direct transcription of nature and, as such, not in need of the analytical and scientific skills required for other artistic genres.⁸ Within the practice of still-life painting itself, there was a gendered hierarchy that privileged masculine-oriented works such as William Michael Harnett's trompe l'oeil subjects over the more feminine fruit and vegetable canvases of Roesen and his contemporaries.⁹ *Still Life with Fruit and Champagne Glass's* decorative qualities—the shallow, impenetrable picture plane, the repeated motifs, and the slick surface—may be the result of the artist's experience with porcelain painting in his native Germany and certainly suggests comparisons to that media. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, china painting was evolving into a proper bourgeois hobby for middle-class women and a form of manual training for poor immigrant ones, and this association may have only furthered any connection of Roesen's paintings with feminine qualities.

As a counterpoint to these works and the issues of exoticism and gender they introduce, it is worthwhile to consider *At Auction* (fig. 4), a slightly later, twentieth-century example by Elizabeth Okie Paxton. Trained at Boston's Cowles Art School and married to one

⁷ Gerds 1969: 86.

⁸ Gerds 1976: 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.



Figure 3. Andrew John Henry Way [American, 1826–1888]. *Wild Grapes*, c. 1875. Oil on canvas; 61.6 x 46 cm [24 ¼ x 18 ⅞ in.]. UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5583.



Figure 4. Elizabeth Okie Paxton (American, 1877–1971). *At Auction*, undated. Oil on canvas; 91.4 x 101.6 cm (36 x 40 in.). UNL—Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5584.

of the city's most prominent artists, William McGregor Paxton, the painter herself specialized in still-life compositions of breakfast trays in domestic interiors, cluttered yet carefully arranged curios, and window displays—all subjects typically described as feminine.¹⁰ Here she created a dizzying catalogue of exquisite and exotic items up for sale: an embroidered rug in scarlet colors cascades from the ceiling, forming the basis of a strong triangular composition that is repeated by a silver soup tureen in the center and a coffee service at the sides and then reiterated a third time below with a series of blue-and-white Japanese export porcelain. Intermingled with these objects are a rectangular wood-cased mantle clock, only half visible behind the rug; a bud vase of European porcelain in the shape of a sea leaf; an Asian figurine tucked behind the lid of a tureen in the background; and two books, one with gilt edges and clasps, which indicate both the owner's erudition and wealth. Finally, a life-size painting dominates the background, its carved, ornamental frame just visible on either side of the rug, while a black parasol with ruffled edges completes the array.

Like many of her contemporaries, Paxton was an Impressionist who was interested in exploring the effects of light on a well-balanced composition. In some ways, *At Auction* relies upon familiar codes: the accouterments of world travel and education—the painting, patterned rug, Asian and European ceramics, and books—denote a high level of education and status. It is the parasol, however, more than any other piece in this painting, that subverts expectations about still life and gender. Delicate with frilled edges, this object is clearly characterized as feminine, and it marks the surrounding objects and space in the same way. In addition, the paper label tied to the parasol's handle classifies it as a commodity and, along with the other merchandise on display, reinforces the consumerist voyeurism that is part and parcel of the work's appeal. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans perceived department stores, window displays, and the shopping they encouraged as a female sphere of influence within an increasingly consumer-driven economy—a sphere that provided opportunities for independence and female influence on the American home.¹¹ In its own way, Paxton's *At Auction* suggests that economic autonomy and aesthetic discrimination—in this case, on the auction-house floor—were important ingredients of a woman's consumerist activities. In so doing, it provides an alternative to the masculine-oriented vision of works such as Roesen's, still-life paintings that, for all their feminine associations, imagine power as residing in the mastery of agriculture, botany, and science.

¹⁰ Erica E. Hirshler, *A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston, 1870–1940*, exh. cat. (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001): 113.

¹¹ Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873–1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 122–32.



WITH OR WITHOUT FLOWERS: THE OBJECT AS STILL LIFE

Brandon K. Ruud

In 1881 William Day Gates founded the Illinois firm American Terra Cotta and Ceramic Company; two decades later, he introduced a line of earthenware called Teco Pottery. In 1905 he advertised his sinuous, Art-Nouveau inspired, floral-form vases as perfect “for decorative purposes with or without flowers.”¹ Gates’s was by no means the first turn-of-the-century ceramics company to incorporate floral and vegetal motifs into its designs, which became a hallmark of the contemporaneous Arts and Crafts movement. In fact, he used molds and mass-production techniques for his pottery, conceiving of Teco as an inexpensive alternative to his competitors’ more elaborate, handmade vases. However, he may have been the first of his colleagues to celebrate three-dimensional objects generally—and ceramics specifically—as works worthy of aesthetic contemplation and beauty in their own right, as more than mere flower holders or subordinate elements in still-life paintings. Whether conscious or not, Gates’s advertisement acknowledged the shift in how people viewed their homes and, more importantly, the aesthetic potential of the objects within them. Ceramists and designers throughout the twentieth century embraced and furthered this message by creating a wide range of utilitarian artworks, a tradition that has continued in various guises to the present day.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Arts and Crafts societies sprang up in cities across the United States. Their founders were inspired by the British design reformers John Ruskin and William Morris, who called for a return to handcrafting, joy in labor, and beauty in everyday objects; Morris, for instance, famously exhorted his followers, “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”² Artists, craftspeople, and reformers established the first American arts and crafts society in Boston in 1897. Perhaps no other city’s artistic contributions better reflect the wider shift in practice that characterized the Arts and Crafts movement at this time: rather than privileging stand-alone easel paintings, artists moved toward a harmonious, integrated, organic approach to creating natural-looking objects that suggest—rather than duplicate—the beauty of still lifes. The Boston Society of Arts and Crafts’s mission statement, for example, insisted upon “the necessity of sobriety and restraint, of ordered arrangement, of due regard for the

¹ Gates Potteries, *Hints for Gifts and Home Decoration*, sale cat. (Terra Cotta, Ill.: Gates Potteries, 1905): 3.

² William Morris, “The Beauty of Life,” lecture, Birmingham School of Design, Feb. 19, 1880, quoted in Gillian Naylor, ed., *William Morris by Himself: Designs and Writings* (New York: New York Graphic Society/Little Brown, 1988): 210.

Opposite: Artus van Briggel. *Lorelei Vase*, 1920s. Detail; see page 33.



Figure 1. Designed by George Prentiss Kendrick (American, 1850–1919). Decorated by Ruth Erickson (active c. 1905). Made at Grueby Faience Company, Boston, Massachusetts. *Vase*, c. 1905. Glazed earthenware; 31.8 x 22.9 x 21.6 cm (12 ½ x 9 x 8 ½ in.). UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2739.

relation between the form of an object and its use, and of harmony and fitness in the decoration put upon it.”³

The Sheldon’s collection contains a vase made at Boston’s Grueby Faience Company in about 1905 that exemplifies this artistic manifesto and, implicitly, the new interest in marrying still-life forms with objects (fig. 1). The vase was likely designed by George Prentiss Kendrick and ornamented by Ruth Erickson, one of the many young women employed by Grueby as a decorator. It possesses a solid gourdlike form and contains a series of highly regular, incised patterns that rise to the top like stylized plant leaves and are topped with a second concentric series of blooms around the lip. The piece’s muted finish, simplified surface decoration, and reliance on abstracted floral and natural elements also owes a debt to Japonism, the craze for Japanese art and culture that reached its zenith at the turn of the nineteenth century and was an important aesthetic inspiration in Boston at the time.⁴ In truth, that the floral elements on the vase are incised rather than applied make the design an integral part of the object, not just an addition to the surface; this reflected a prevalent aspect of Japanese artistic theory. The fact that consumers of Grueby’s products generally, and this vase in particular, were asked to establish their own uses for the object—lamp base, vase, purely decorative object—also suggests the formal breakdown between the high and decorative arts, the aesthetic and utilitarian.

Artists in other parts of the country, and the subsequent generation of potters and ceramists, carried the aesthetic evolution of the object one step further. Artus van Briggles, for example, started his career as a decorator and porcelain painter for Cincinnati’s Rookwood Pottery Company, founded by wealthy ceramist and society doyenne Maria Longworth Nichols Storer in 1880.⁵ Van Briggles is credited with instituting and popularizing Native American subjects at Rookwood by the early 1890s, portraits he based on United States Bureau of Ethnology photographs that the company likely purchased as early as 1888. After being diagnosed with tuberculosis, however, he left the firm in 1899 for Colorado Springs, where he established Van Briggles Pottery, which became famous for its matte glazes. Although figurative in inception, Van Briggles’s *Lorelei Vase* (fig. 2) in Sheldon’s collection blurs the lines between the aesthetic and the utilitarian. Here the figure of a female siren begins at the lip of the vase; her facial features are just visible in the vessel’s interior (see page 28), and her hair and flowing

3 “Announcements for MDCCCXCIX, The Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Massachusetts” (Boston: Thomas P. Smith Printing Company), n.pag., quoted in Marilee Boyd Meyer et al., *Inspiring Reform: Boston’s Arts and Crafts Movement*, exh. cat. (Wellesley, Mass.: Davis Museum and Cultural Center/New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997): 33.

4 The city was one of the first in the country with serious collections of Japanese art. In addition, the artist Arthur Wesley Dow, curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, made intensive studies of Japanese art, and his theories were funneled to many students in Massachusetts and beyond through his artworks, publications, and summer school in Ipswich.

5 For more on Van Briggles and a reproduction of the vases, see Anita J. Ellis, “Rookwood and the American Indian,” in *Rookwood and the American Indian: Masterpieces of American Art Pottery from the James J. Gardner Collection*, exh. cat. (Cincinnati Art Museum/Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2007): 69–70, 85, 230–36, fig. 5.

garments spiral down the sides. While the small opening at top could accommodate flowers, such a use would defeat the artistic effect by hiding the figural form.

Inspired by the reforms of the Arts and Crafts movement, later artists continued the tradition of handcrafting and treating their objects as individual works of art. They were also influenced by the American Studio Ceramics movement led by Charles Fergus Binns, who advocated the artist's involvement in all areas of ceramic production, from molding to firing and glazing. Potters such as Majia Grotell, who had studied with Binns at New York's Alfred University, experimented with form and glaze to create unique combinations that straddled the completely aesthetic and the practical. The artist's striking bowl (fig. 3) from Sheldon's collection—likely made while she was a teacher at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan—is certainly functional in its form. Grotell treated the surface as a canvas, however, creating beautiful contrasts between the naturalistic colors of the dappled exterior and the almost shocking reddish orange interior; as in the case of Van Briggles's vase, actual use would decrease the beauty of the artwork, negating the intended effect. Grotell's student at Cranbrook, Toshiko Takaezu, also experimented with these ideas, using her ceramic creations as the support for her expressionistic, gestural brushstrokes, but also increasingly voiding the object's function. In her early *Double Spouted Jar* (fig. 4) from the mid-1950s, Takaezu played with the idea of functionality. On the one hand, she added two spouts, which magnified the bottle's uses yet also rendered them metaphorical and symbolic rather than actual. On the other, she maintained shapes and colors rooted in nature, drawing the bottle's form from the bulb of the native-African tamarind tree and choosing organic colors inspired by vegetation. Indeed, the artist has equated pottery making with "cooking and growing vegetables," a gesture that links her works with the more literal subjects and themes of traditional still-life painting.⁶

This emphasis on functional objects as worthy sources of visual stimulation and contemplation was not limited to ceramists and potters. Early in the twentieth century, completely different groups of artists—the Dadaists and Surrealists—were also altering rules and perceptions about art and what it meant to make it. While Marcel Duchamp or Man Ray, for instance, might shudder to have their readymades associated with something as conventional as a still life, they "posited radically new interpretations" and "reinventions" of the genre—in this case, through a frequent, provocative reliance on found objects.⁷ Man Ray's *Cadeau (Gift)* (fig. 5), first fabricated in 1921 and replicated continuously thereafter, elevates a domestic appliance to the level of fine art. Here, like the ceramists and potters discussed earlier, the artist

⁶ Lucinda H. Gedeon, ed., Toshiko Takaezu, exh. cat. (Purchase, N.Y.: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2001): 5.

⁷ Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1997): 71.



Figure 2. Designed by Artus van Briggle (American, 1869–1904). *Lorelei Vase*, 1920s. Semivitreous ceramic; 24.1 x 11.4 x 10.2 cm (9 ½ x 4 ½ x 4 in.). UNL—Gift of Elizabeth B. Mueller, U-2816.



Figure 3. Maija Grotell (American, born Finland, 1899–1973). *Bowl*, undated. Ceramic; 10.2 x 15.9 x 15.2 cm (4 x 6 ¼ x 6 in.). UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-319.



Figure 5. Toshiko Takaezu (American, born 1922). *Double Spouted Jar*, 1955/56. Stoneware; 24.1 x 16.5 x 14.6 cm (9 ½ x 6 ½ x 5 ¾ in.). UNL–Bequest of Bertha Schaefer, U-868.

effectively negated the useful applications of a practical object; in this case, he transformed a household iron by applying a series of nails to its functional side. In so doing, he forces viewers to reconsider both its purpose and its beauty by concentrating on the simple linearity of the handle and the geometric, solid bulk of the flat tool.

Using different approaches, and inspired by distinct aesthetic and cultural agendas, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century artists—Arts and Crafts reformers, Studio Ceramists, Dadaists, and Surrealists—not only questioned still life but redefined it. What resulted were the sort of three-dimensional objects we have seen here—works that in some cases incorporated the genre’s traditional motifs and subjects, and in others subverted them completely.



Figure 5. Man Ray (American, 1890–1976). *Cadeau (Gift)*, 1921; fabricated 1974. Cast iron and tacks; 16.5 x 9.8 x 10.5 cm (6 ½ x 3 ¾ x 4 ¼ in.). UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2860. © Man Ray Estate/Trust.



OTHER AND SELF: EVOLVING MANIFESTATIONS OF PRIMITIVISM IN TWO STILL LIVES BY MARSDEN HARTLEY

Randall R. Griffey

Marsden Hartley's *Still Life with Fan* (fig. 2) and *Flowers—Blue Background* (fig. 3) serve as rough bookends to his stylistically diverse career as a painter, which began around 1905. Featuring a fan, flowers, pears, and stemware rendered as semiabstract, angular forms, *Still Life with Fan* evokes Hartley's heady, cosmopolitan experiences in Europe in the early 1910s, when he attended Gertrude Stein's famed salons and studied Cubism and other artistic movements in Paris. Alternatively, *Flowers—Blue Background*, more exuberant and iconic in appearance, exemplifies his modified artistic priorities throughout the final years of his life, by which point he was firmly ensconced on the East Coast and touted his regional credentials as "the painter from Maine." Despite their marked differences, these compositions are both informed by the shifting discourses of primitivism that were central ingredients in the construction of modernist art and American national identity during the first half of the twentieth century.

Fundamentally, this pair of paintings testifies to Hartley's devotion to still life over the course of his career.¹ Time and again, he returned to the genre, often in transitional periods when he aspired to find new directions in his art or sort out formal problems. At other moments, he found it to be a pleasurable respite from his more demanding engagement with subjects such as landscape. To a degree, Hartley's devotion to still life can be attributed to William Merritt Chase, from whom he took instruction in New York in 1899. Usually executed as demonstration pieces before his students, Chase's virtuosic pictures of dead fish and copper pots legitimized still-life painting for the next generation of American artists, including not only Hartley, but also Georgia O'Keeffe and Charles Sheeler, who also numbered among Chase's protégés.

However, a more deeply enduring model for Hartley—both in still life painting and for art in general—was the French Postimpressionist Paul Cézanne, whose works he first saw in person in late 1911 or early 1912. One of the towering figures of international modernism, Cézanne occupied a large and permanent place in Hartley's artistic pantheon. Linking the Frenchman with another one of his heroes, the poet Walt Whitman, Hartley wrote in 1921, "These are the geniuses who have done most for these two arts of the present time, it is Whitman and Cézanne who have clarified the sleeping

¹ For a thorough overview of Hartley's still lifes, see Bruce Weber, *The Heart of the Matter: The Still Lives of Marsden Hartley*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry Hill Galleries, 2003).

Opposite: Marsden Hartley. *Flowers—Blue Background*, 1941. Detail; see page 41.



Figure 1. Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943). *Peaches*, 1927. Silverpoint; 69.2 x 54.6 cm (27 ¼ x 21 ½ in.). UNL–Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-3111.

eye and withheld it from being totally blinded, from the onslaughts of jaded tradition.”² Like many of his peers, Hartley admired Cézanne’s formal invention, which produced a seemingly perfect union of artifice and truth in works such as his still lifes, qualities Hartley emulated in his own works for decades (see fig. 1).

Filled with boldly, oddly shifting perspectives and almost architectonically rendered forms—even the drapery appears to be heavily starched—*Still Life with Fan* recalls the precedent of Cézanne, only with an accentuated angularity that suggests shapes carved from wood. The painting’s warm brown palette further ties it to the medium of wood carving. These stylistic attributes betray Hartley’s study of “primitive” art—ostensibly non-Western art—including, most famously, African sculpture, an important influence on Picasso and Braque’s early Cubism. Many of Hartley’s colleagues from this period, including Max Weber, encouraged him to embrace such art for its perceived honesty of conception and execution, which was thought to be far removed from lifeless academic art and superficial Impressionism, both products of the bourgeois marketplace.

Still Life with Fan dates to 1912, the year in which Hartley first made a visit that was *de rigueur* for any self-respecting modernist. This was a trip to the Musée de Trocadero, the great Parisian repository of African art that had largely been acquired through France’s colonial ventures. One is tempted to interpret this painting, filled with markers of Western cultural identity that have seemingly succumbed to the rough-hewn primitive, as a kind of allegory of Africa’s newfound dominance over Western civilization—at least in matters of avant-garde aesthetics. Even so, the canvas simultaneously betrays Hartley’s own colonizing subject position vis-à-vis Africa, as it essentializes African art as necessarily unrefined and abstract relative to more sophisticated European culture, whose traditions stretch back to the Italian Renaissance.

By the time Hartley painted *Flowers—Blue Background* in 1941, a different kind of primitive art had emerged as a highly desirable model not only of aesthetic integrity, but also of native artistic genius: colonial American, or “folk,” art. As one sign and effect of a sweeping reevaluation of American cultural history that followed World War I, many artists, along with collectors, critics, and dealers, began reassessing the aesthetic merits of folk art. To some, previously neglected, seemingly inconsequential folk images—particularly portraits (see fig. 4)—now seemed protomodernist in their quasi-Cubist abstraction and no-nonsense functionalism. Others lauded examples of folk art as the work of untutored hands, uncontaminated by sophisticated foreign theories. In the 1930s, such perceived evidence of homegrown self-sufficiency assumed new significance in the midst of pervasive economic hardship. Moreover, the rise of

² Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville, and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921): 32.



Figure 2. Marsden Hartley. *Still Life with Fan*, 1912. Oil on canvas; 92.1 x 71.1 cm [36 ¼ x 28 in.]. NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial, N-124.

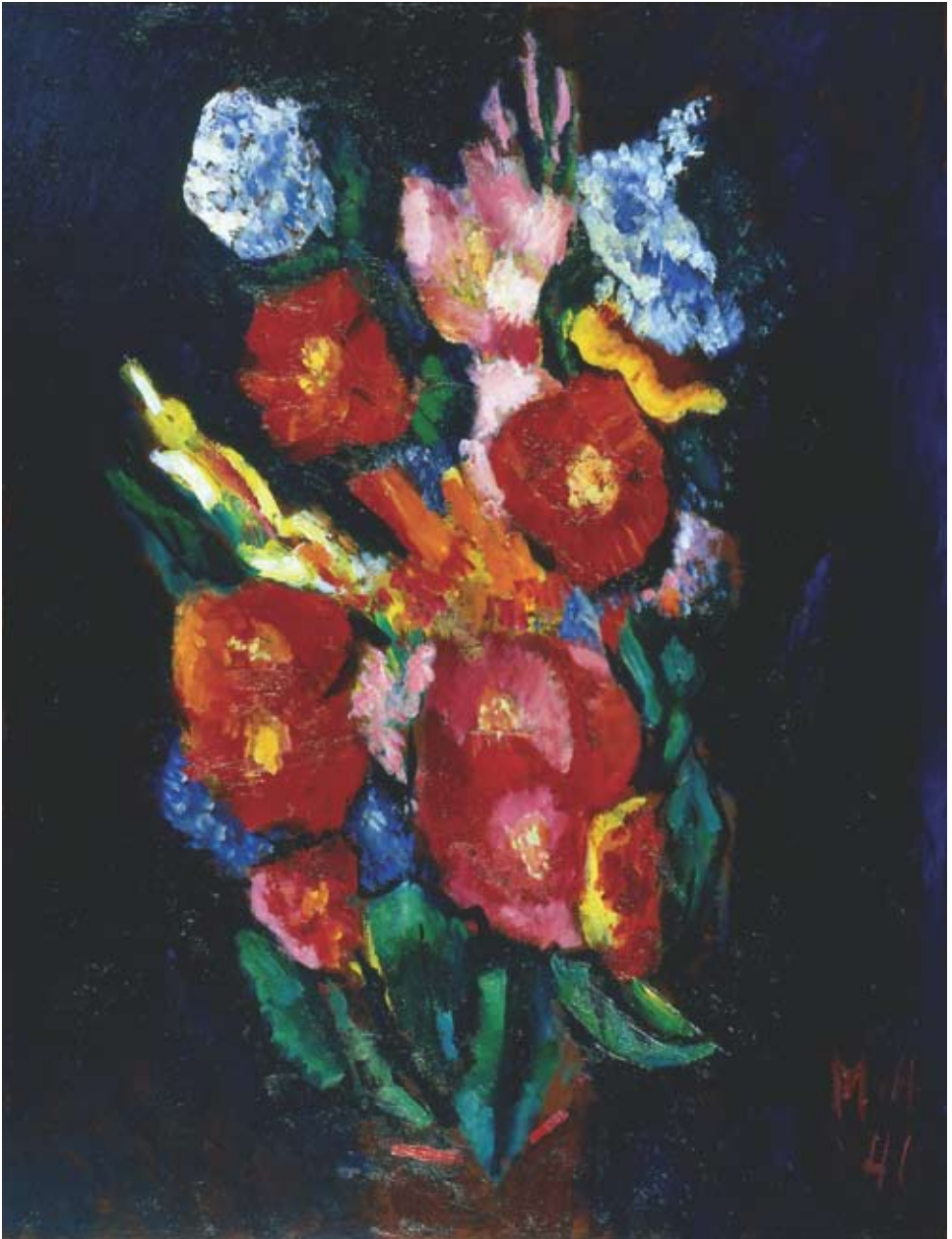


Figure 3. Marsden Hartley. *Flowers—Blue Background*, 1941. Oil on Masonite; 69.2 x 54.6 cm (27 ¼ x 21 ½ in.). UNL—Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-3112.

fascism throughout Europe (and beyond) and communism (both at home and abroad) gave the reception of folk art a distinctly nationalist bent. One byproduct of the more general cultural nationalism of this period was a common tendency to collapse all foreign “isms”—fascism, communism, Cubism, and Surrealism, among others—into a single entity, each an undesirable, even dangerous offspring of too much reliance on intellectual theory rather than feeling. Thus, Americanness was imagined as a better, primitive alternative to European intellectualism and sophistication.³ No longer the Other, the primitive became domesticated and internalized in many dimensions of American culture, including art, between the wars.

Flowers—Blue Background evokes this ethos of the American primitive, which Hartley, like many other artists of his generation, accommodated in an attempt to secure a high place for himself in the art world. The composition exhibits numerous qualities that were stereotypically associated with folk art. Chief among these is a seeming directness of execution, which is signified by the painter’s irregular treatment of the surface, largely unmodulated use of color, and an apparently boundless palette. Individually and collectively, these characteristics imply that Hartley’s creative source was intuition more than intellect—still another popular yet misguided assumption about folk art at the time.

The composition’s relative symmetry also aligns it with folk painting both conceptually and aesthetically. Hartley pressed the joyful bouquet close to the foreground, a gesture that precludes the inclusion of other potentially distracting forms. The form’s centrality and isolation grant it an iconic status of the sort more typically reserved for the depiction of religious figures, including the *santos* Hartley painted during his stay in New Mexico in 1918–19, another aspect of his evolving primitivism and search for authenticity.⁴ Hartley’s implicit elevation of his subject suggests, in turn, his own humility, a quality also commonly considered to be an integral characteristic of the folk artist.

Although driven both by market forces and his own professional aspirations, Hartley’s accommodation of the cult of the American primitive dovetailed profoundly with his propensity to create visual art and poetry that served elegiac functions. Indeed, the artist’s most enduringly compelling imagery pays homage—like a bouquet of flowers—to something or someone that has been lost. It is unusually fitting, then, that the painting on Hartley’s easel in his Ellsworth, Maine, studio at the time of his death in September 1943 was a large unfinished still life of roses, an ode to the inescapable, poignant losses that give shape and meaning to one’s life. Successfully eliding the personal and the national, Hartley’s late paintings, such as *Flowers—Blue Background*, consequently marked him by the time of his death in 1943 as a “great” American painter, one whose art was “natural” and, thereby, inherently native.

³ This construction of national identity extended longstanding patterns in U.S. history; see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

⁴ For such an example by Hartley, see Weber, 90, pl. 10.



Figure 4. Artist unknown. *Girl with Rose and Book*, late eighteenth century. Oil on canvas; 69.9 x 69.9 cm (27 ½ x 27 ½ in.). UNL—Gift of Edith Gregor Halpert, U-447.



STILL LIFE—AND DEATH

Brandon K. Ruud

Unlike the English term *still life*, the French name for the genre, *nature morte*, mentions death directly, capturing the interpretations and messages traditionally ascribed to this kind of artwork. Paintings such as Charles Rain's *Hand of Fate* (fig. 1), for instance, obviously rely on conventional elements that evoke both the fleetingness and vagaries of life and its ultimate end. In its somber mood and careful selection of objects, Rain's canvas follows the tradition of *vanitas* painting, which typically encompasses Northern European artworks from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that explore themes of death, decay, and the meaninglessness of life. Here the skull clearly symbolizes the transitory nature of existence, while the diagram of the hand on the background wall and the esoteric Tarot cards on the table in the foreground suggest contact with the beyond. Other works such as John La Farge's oil sketch of a wild duck, a gunshot wound to its chest (see opposite), and Larry Johnson's painting *Stacked Meat*, with its unappetizing masses of pinkish flesh, address death explicitly and also remind us of the violence that sometimes accompanies it.

Perhaps no work in the Sheldon's collection speaks to these aspects of still-life painting more powerfully than Jackson Pollock's *Untitled (Composition with Ritual Scene)* (fig. 2). The artist began the painting during the late 1930s, at a critical juncture in his career. In 1930 he had followed his artist brother Charles to New York City, joining him as a pupil of Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students' League. Although Pollock worked with Benton until 1935 and adopted many of his instructor's hard-drinking, urban cowboy ways, he later claimed that all Benton gave him was something to rebel against. While many critics are all too eager to accept this explanation and dismiss any lasting influence on Benton's part, his impact and pedagogical spirit are obviously present in this canvas. In fact, his interest in mural painting—one that extended even into his smaller canvases—is clearly apparent in the horizontal format, rhythmic fluidity, and framing devices. More importantly, Pollock joined Benton's classroom at a critical juncture for both artists: the latter was just beginning his series of murals for the boardroom of New York's New School for Social Research alongside the great Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco.

Both Benton and Orozco were given relative freedom over their subjects. Benton titled his murals *America Today*, focusing on the development of new technology, the nation's industrial progress, metropolitan contributions, and regional particularities. Orozco, on the other hand, chose to concentrate on the revolutionary movement and completed a

Opposite: John La Farge (American, 1835-1910). *Sketch of Wild Duck*, 1860. Oil on panel; 46.4 x 35.6 cm (18 1/4 x 14 in.). UNL—Gift of the Lincoln Alumni Chapter of Delta Delta Delta Sorority, U-431.

cycle that celebrated workers, the labor struggle, and possibly even the future United Nations with a depiction of representatives from various countries seated around a table of universal brotherhood. While Pollock would have encountered Orozco's work here, he was already familiar with it. Before moving to New York, he had attended communist meetings in Los Angeles that introduced him to the art of the Mexican muralists. As a result, he and his brother visited Pomona College in Claremont, California, in the spring of 1930 to see the artist's large-scale frescoes. Pollock frequently described Orozco as "the real man" in art and, even after he had abandoned figuration and developed his signature drip paintings, he continued to refer to the *Prometheus* mural at Pomona as "the greatest painting in North America."¹ Although Benton left New York in 1935, Pollock continued to explore his interest in the Mexican muralist movement through another of its great practitioners, David Alfaro Siqueiros. In 1936 the artist enrolled at Siqueiros's Union Square workshop, where he continued not only to investigate the master's formal approaches and motifs, but also to experiment with unconventional tools and materials such as airbrushes, spray guns, and synthetic paints and lacquers.²

Untitled (Composition with Ritual Scene) shows how Pollock adapted and reinterpreted these Mexican artists' visual lexicon and themes of ritual violence: the painting's dynamism, exaggerated chiaroscuro, heroic grandeur, and twisting rhythm owe a clear debt to Orozco. Pollock created a composition of thick impasto dominated by yellow, red, and blue, which catch the viewer's eye and lead it to key points throughout the painting. In the background at left, a group of attenuated, sticklike figures seems to depart from the scene, raising their arms in violence with bloody knives or remnants of sacrifice in their hands. The foreground is populated with more traditional still-life elements that also carry a sense of death and violence, all arranged on a neutral-colored cement slab that evokes both a dining table and a sacrificial altar. At right, a compote contains fruit or vegetables, perhaps offering a more metaphorical reference to death and decay. On the left, we encounter the dried remains of a fish, its bony carcass clearly outlined in black. Its triangular head—as sharp as a knife itself—holds a staring eye, while the tail leads the viewer's eye first to the center of the composition and then back through the painting to the source of the dismemberment: the bloodthirsty participants. Here, directly behind the compote, what appears to be a carcass—perhaps that of a bull—is splayed over the back of a figure, its head lopped to the left side and its skeletal frame slumped to the right. Many of these elements—a crowd of celebrants, nonhuman skulls and skeletal faces, knives, and an impossible tangle of flesh culminating in a bull's head—appear frequently in Pollock's paintings from the late 1930s and early 1940s, which explore similar themes of violence and death.³

1 For these quotes and for more on the relationship between Orozco and Pollock, see Joan T. Washburn Gallery, *Pollock, Orozco, and Siqueiros*, exh. cat. (New York: Joan T. Washburn Gallery), and Charles Harrison, "Jackson Pollock," in *Varieties of Modernism*, ed. Paul Wood, Art of the Twentieth Century, 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 132–33.

2 David Wheeler, *Art Since Mid-Century: 1945 to the Present* (New York: Vendome Press, 1991): 41.

3 Three very similar works are *Untitled* (1938/41; Art Institute of Chicago); *Naked Man with a Knife* (1938–40; Tate Britain) and *Untitled (Bald Woman with Skeleton)* (1938–41; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College).



Figure 1. Charles Whedon Rain (American, 1911–1985). *Hand of Fate*, 1962. Oil on board; 8.6 x 13.3 cm (3 3/8 x 5 1/4 in.). UNL–Gift of Robert C. Reinhart, U-3823.

Pollock's interest in these motifs was not limited to the Mexican muralists, however, but grew from other life experiences and intellectual interests as well. One of these was an attraction to Native American art and pictographs that the artist traced to his boyhood in Wyoming and California. Another was Jungian psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the importance of primitive archetypes. From the late 1930s into the 1940s, Pollock sought treatment for personal problems including alcoholism and attempted to find his own creative voice. For him, as for many artists of his generation, Jungian psychiatry represented a way to, as he put it, get "in touch with the powers of our unconscious."⁴ A related influence on Pollock was the artist and theorist John D. Graham's highly regarded *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937), which advocated "the art of the primitive races" as a means of bringing to the surface "the clarities of the unconscious mind."⁵

In paintings such as *Untitled (Composition with Ritual Scene)*, then, the visual grammar of Native America—animals, mask forms, and pictographic drawing—represented for Pollock the primordial archetypes around which humanity was organized, also functioning as images that merged the conscious and unconscious minds. Increasingly, these forms came to signify not only the buried strata of emotions, but

⁴ For this quote and more on this aspect of Pollock's career, see W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995): 171, 169–92.

⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 2. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Untitled (Composition with Ritual Scene)*, 1938–41. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite; 45.7 x 120 cm (18 x 47 ¼ in.). NAA–Nebraska Art Association Collection, through the gifts of Mrs. Henry C. Woods, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Frank Woods, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Woods, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Woods, Jr. by exchange: Woods Charitable Fund in memory of Thomas C. (Chip) Woods, III, and other generous donors, N-767. © 2010 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



also a “shamanic” process that involved psychic preparation, a direct access to the unconscious and, most importantly, a healing and transformative power. The Sheldon’s painting does not stand as an emblem of violence; instead, it symbolizes how the ritual of death anticipates renewal and rebirth. These themes were dear to Pollock and his contemporaries during the interwar era, as the horrors of World War I were still fresh and fascism began to spread its tentacles across Europe.⁶ In this context, Pollock’s canvas connects itself to the still-life tradition by exploring death and decay, and making renewal an implicit part of its message.

⁶ For this interpretation, see Marc Restellini et al., *Jackson Pollock et la chamanisme*, exh. cat. (Paris: Pinacothèque de Paris, 2008): 130–31.



PLEASING THE PALETTE: GASTRONOMY, ECONOMY, AND THE CONTEMPORARY STILL LIFE

Janet L. Farber

Over the centuries, the recipe for a good still life has been lovingly tweaked and codified. Artists might offer up a carefully arranged selection of trinkets and treasures reflecting their patrons' interests or aspirations—a weighty tome, a piece of music, a flickering candle with wicking smoke to signal a soulful presence. They might deliver a bountiful bouquet of fresh flowers in a lustrous vase on a tapestry-covered table and perhaps add an insect to animate the scene or depict fallen petals to underscore impending mortality. Especially gifted illusionists might fool the viewer's eye into believing that there is a coin or piece of paper stuck to the surface of the canvas. Still lifes featuring food and drink have especially dominated the menu. Whether featuring a sumptuous feast or a frugal repast, the genre has offered artists rich opportunities for accomplished, naturalistic verisimilitude, whether it be rendering the fuzz on a peach, the sweat on cheese, or the reflection of liquids in glass vessels. It has also provided a field for creative and conceptual play involving these incarnations of our human needs, wants, and cravings. Not surprisingly, then, still life has seemingly flourished during sound economic times, catering to broad public taste.

So it is fitting that American artists in the prosperous decades following World War II found a way back to the genre, which had come to exist on the margins of individualist, progressive modern art. A return to objects as subjects became not merely an antidote to the existentialist universalism of Abstract Expressionism, but also a platform for trenchant discourse about time, place, and culture. In a rapidly expanding, Keynesian-based economy of consumption, foodstuffs in art bore a newly symbolic weight of commerce, national identity, and contemporary cultural values as had not been seen since Americans refined the Dutch-inspired genre in the nineteenth century. In addition, artists in the 1950s and 1960s were witness to an explosion in the presence of marketing and advertising. It seemed preordained that these influences would have a similarly catalyzing effect on codes of representation and approaches to style and medium.

One new approach involved the isolated foregrounding of a single object as the sole subject of an artwork. Jasper Johns took a leading role in this innovation, choosing to make solitary representations of what he called “things the mind already knows,”

Opposite: Jasper Johns (American, born 1930). *Bread*, 1969 [detail]. Lead with hand coloring; 58.4 x 43.2 cm (23 x 17 in.). UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-3085. Art © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

ranging among the most familiar and ordinary of products (Bass ale cans), signs (numbers), and symbols (the American flag). In *Bread* (see page 50), a single, perfect slice of white bread floats against an uninflected background of charcoal gray. Although this humble staple might seem too unremarkable to be celebrated in this way, it stood for the instantly recognizable virtue of industrial perfection delivered in one soft, aromatic, and tasty serving. Experience, bolstered by marketing, had taught shoppers to rely on its consistency, wholesomeness, shelf-stability, and nutritive value. Thanks to the miracle of Eisenhower's interstate highway system, fresh bread was conveniently available nationwide on supermarket shelves. If this is such a modern "Wonder," why not confer iconic status upon it? And this is to say nothing of Johns's ironies in the artwork's making: it is a multiple and is made of lead, yet each slice is individually hand painted.

The comforts of food in the domestic environment were also a recurrent theme in Tom Wesselmann's art. In *Still Life No. 15* (fig. 1), a prototypical early work, the artist created a vision reminiscent of a pastoral July Fourth picnic, complete with an American flag, a portrait of George Washington, and a meal of grilled steak, fruit, and liquor on a red gingham tablecloth. In the manner of a Cubist collage, he tipped the perspective forward and combined painted passages with real-life elements pasted to the canvas: wallpaper, a frame and red velvet mat, a picture of a steak, and a billboard ad for Four Roses whiskey. Like fellow Pop artists James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol, Wesselmann was attracted to the scale and reproductive techniques of commercial art; however, he denied sharing an interest in implied social commentary, attempting instead to keep his presentation neutral by using artificial elements.

Food was anything but an indifferent element in the work of Wayne Thiebaud. As in *Salads, Sandwiches, and Desserts* (fig. 2), he composed from memory such American standards as slices of pumpkin pie, chocolate puddings, and club sandwiches, all rendered in vivid colors with deliberately lush, icinglike paints. Although the artist suffused these items with a certain nostalgic air, he also loved them for their uniform geometric rigor. Rather than adhere to the dynamic pyramidal compositions of traditional still-life painting, Thiebaud instead orchestrated an abundance of prepared foods in neat rows such as might appear in a cafeteria or deli. He preferred the ritualistic replication that these comestibles also represented; restaurant desserts were seldom hand made on premises but rather purchased from commercial bakeries, which both created and fulfilled expectations of predictable "homemade" quality, look, taste, variety, and availability.



Figure 1. Tom Wesselmann (American, 1931–2004). *Still Life No. 15*, 1962. Collage, oil, printed papers, photograph, and fabric on canvas; 214.6 x 183.5 cm (84 ½ x 72 ¼ in.). UNL—Gift of Mrs. Olga N. Sheldon, U-3282. Art © Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Figure 2. Wayne Thiebaud (American, born 1920). *Salads, Sandwiches, and Desserts*, 1962. Oil on canvas; 139.7 x 182.9 cm (55 x 72 in.). NAA–Thomas C. Woods Memorial, N-138. Art © Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Figure 3. Ralph Ladell Goings (American, born 1928). *Pie Case*, 1975. Oil on canvas; 61 x 86.7 cm (24 x 34 1/8 in.). NAA–Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-340. © Ralph Goings.

Where Thiebaud only implied a restaurant setting, Ralph Goings focused on its *mise-en-scène*. Beginning in the late 1960s, artists like Goings combined such Pop Art interests as consumer culture and reprographics with the hard literalness and perceived neutrality of that most mechanical form of reproduction—color photography—to create illusionistic, highly detailed paintings of the urban streetscape. Frequent subjects in this recessionary age of embargoes and stagflation, affordable eateries and their contents were also favored for their bright, reflective surfaces, gleaming countertops, and glass storefronts. In *Pie Case* (fig. 3), Goings presents a diner’s-eye view of ordinary fare ready to serve: cakes, doughnuts, and pies; single-serving cereal boxes; a milkshake machine; and a soda dispenser with Pepsi products. It is such a completely realized snapshot of an American time and place that any academic questions about transcription versus invention fade into the background.

In the 1980s era of Reagan’s supply-side economy, art shifted from aping the methods of commodification to engaging its terms directly. Artists relocated goods straight from the street and store into the gallery. They imagined their roles not as makers of precious things, but as collaborators whose creations were a stage for dialogue between the viewer and the object. Among these practitioners was Haim Steinbach, known for pairing found and purchased items on handcrafted, wedge-shaped shelves. His sculptures share with traditional still lifes that urgent contemplation of the humble object set on a tabletop, but there the similarity ends. In works such as *Untitled (Halco and Tour d’Argent salt and pepper shakers)* (fig. 4), Steinbach set up an objective dialectic of opposites regarding the restaurant shakers’ social, ritual, and utilitarian functions: new in relationship to old, streamlined to ornate, ordinary to rare, American to European, daily to fine dining. Even their function carries the residue of financial, gastronomic, and social history, as the once-precious commodities they contain were greatly responsible for cultural and economic contact between civilizations.

In the early twenty-first century, American consumer culture is a given. The market is ceaselessly driven to create, refine, and promote “new and improved” ways to keep food not merely a staple but a product conflating comfort, convenience, freshness, nutrition, taste, and value. Prepared foods, whether fast from the drive-thru or in grocer’s cases, are legion in number and appeal to our overworked, multitasked households. Simultaneously, there’s been a tremendous expansion of the refined palate thanks to the advent of “foodie” culture, which addresses aspects of nourishment, science, and satiety, as well as being a form of social lubrication in and of itself. A shopper’s vocabulary may now include food that is artisanal, local, natural, organic, raw, sustainable, whole, or not genetically modified: food that has heritage, substance, and is truly “authentic.” At the same time, cooking shows ranging from informative to competitive have proliferated into continual offerings on twenty-four-hour food networks.



Figure 4. Haim Steinbach (American, born Israel, 1944). *Untitled (Halco and Tour d'Argent salt and pepper shakers)*, 1989. Stainless steel shelf; stainless steel, glass, and silver salt and pepper shakers; 21 x 33 x 8.6 cm (8 ¼ x 13 x 3 ⅜ in.). UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2963.1--5. © Haim Stainbach.



Figure 5. Vera Mercer (American, born Germany, 1936). *White Goose*, 2009. Color photograph; 149.9 x 198.1 cm (59 x 78 in.). UNL–Mercedes A. Augustine Acquisition Trust, U-5598.

The still-life photographs of Vera Mercer resonate with this blend of Old and New World food culture, where the ingredients represent a personal iconography of provisions regionally sourced and lovingly used. German born, Mercer currently divides her time between Paris and Omaha, Nebraska, where she, along with her husband, has been instrumental in establishing European café culture in several fine and casual dining establishments. In the studio, Mercer selects objects for both visual and vidual interest, photographing them in dramatically lit, baroque arrangements; *White Goose* (fig. 5) features a beautiful waterfowl among eggs, fruit, lotus seeds, and orchids. These are artfully arranged for her large-format camera, which picks out in stunning detail the textures and volumes of each. Combining the tradition of recycling props with the modern advantages of the digital darkroom, Mercer added as the backdrop to her image a darkened detail from another photograph, *Pig* (2006). The extravagant ripeness and realism of the work seems to underscore a reinvigorated understanding of the relationship between our meals and their origins.

Like Old Masters who specialized in particular kinds of genre paintings, Emily Eveleth concentrates on the single-subject breakfast piece: the larger-than-life, inexpensive indulgence of the jelly doughnut (see page 58). With the studied light and deep shadow of Rembrandt or Caravaggio, she bathes her object of yearning in beatific, haloed light. Indeed, the canvas is Eveleth's theater for turning food into a nearly anthropomorphic proposition, as few edible items have ever appeared in paint that so recalled human poses, moods, or attitudes. Does not the fleshy dough and liplike jellied orifice of the protagonist in *True Story* beckon fetchingly, with a come-hither look? Into her doughnuts, Eveleth imparts a delicious range of humor, longing, pathos, and utter sensuality. Exquisite singly or in groups, the pastries seem to serve as tempting updates of Eve's apple: potent reminders that even when the spirit is willing, the flesh may be weak.

The viability of still life as inspiration seems likely to endure, on a varied path, as it has since ancient times. Contemporary American art has tended to view this genre, especially in its focus on food, as a way to address themes of abundance and desire, whether personal or social. It is a somewhat selective view, giving little notice, say, to such broader issues as the effects of climate change on global food supply or meeting the needs of expanding populations worldwide. Even so, this theme provides through beauty and illusionism, through wit and irony a means to comfort, provoke, and satisfy. One thing seems certain: as long as food sustains our bodies, it will as a topic of artistic interest continue to feed our souls.



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

- Robert Carston Arneson (American, 1930–1992)
Brick (from the *Brick Suite*), 1976
Terracotta
10.8 x 21.6 x 6.7 cm (4 ¼ x 8 ½ x 2 ⅝ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2967
- Franz Bertram Aulich (American, born Germany, active c. 1900)
Vase, c. 1900
Belleek china
52.7 x 29.2 x 29.2 cm (20 ¾ x 11 ½ x 11 ½ in.)
UNL–Gift of Charles Lockwood, U-148
- William Bailey (American, born 1930)
Untitled Still Life, 1992
Graphite on paper
50.8 x 61 cm (20 x 24 in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5563
- Frank Weston Benson (American, 1862–1951) *The Dining Room Table*, c. 1919
Oil on canvas
81.6 x 101.3 cm (32 ⅞ x 39 ⅞ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-6
- Nicholas Alden Brooks (American, 1840–1904)
Ten Dollar Bill, 1893/97
Oil on canvas board
8.3 x 18.7 cm (3 ¼ x 7 ⅜ in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5575
- Patrick Henry Bruce (American, 1881–1936)
Forms, c. 1918
Oil and graphite on canvas
57.79 x 71.76 cm (22 ¾ x 28 ¼ in.)
UNL–Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-510
- James Cantrell (American, born 1935)
Jones' Old Kentucky Home Restaurant, 1973
Oil on canvas
29.8 x 44.8 cm (11 ¾ x 17 ⅞ in.)
UNL–Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Seyler, U-2316
- Neil Christensen (American, born 1947)
Boxes: Homage to Gordon Cook, 1994
Oil on board
71.1 x 81.3 cm (28 x 32 in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-3035
- Joseph Cornell (American, 1903–1972)
Pipe Box, c. 1960
Mixed media
18.1 x 33.3 x 9.2 cm (7 ⅛ x 13 ⅛ x 3 ⅝ in.)
UNL–Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust, U-4968
- Andrew Michael Dasburg (American, born France, 1887–1979)
Avocados, 1931
Oil on canvas
41.6 x 50.8 cm (16 ⅜ x 20 in.)
UNL–Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-369
- Stuart Davis (American, 1894–1964)
Arch Hotel, 1929
Oil on canvas
73 x 100.3 cm (28 ¾ x 39 ½ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-268
- Charles Demuth (American, 1883–1935)
Apples, c. 1925
Watercolor on paper
29.8 cm x 45.7 cm (11 ¾ x 18 in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-244
- Preston Dickinson (American, 1891–1930)
Still Life with Round Plate, c. 1924
Gouache on paper
27.3 x 21.6 cm (10 ¾ x 8 ½ in.)
UNL–Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-272
- Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#26 (from *41 Etchings and Drypoints*), 1964
Drypoint, aquatint, and hardground etching
27.6 x 21.6 cm (10 ⅞ x 8 ½ in.)
UNL–Gift of Elinor Poindexter, U-3995.26
- Eddie Dominguez (American, born 1957)
Anton's Flowers II, 2004
Ceramic, glaze, brass, and vinyl
57.5 x 156.8 x 57.5 cm (22 ⅝ x 61 ¾ x 22 ⅝ in.)
UNL–Robert E. Schweser and Fern Beardsley Schweser Acquisition Fund, through the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5396

Opposite: Emily Eveleth (American, born 1960). *True Story*, 2005 [detail]. Oil on canvas; 213.4 x 233.7 cm [84 x 92 in.]. Phil Schragger Collection, Omaha.

Robert Spear Dunning (American, 1829–1905)
Still Life with Orange Sections, undated
Oil on canvas
14 x 14 cm (5 ½ x 5 ½ in.)
UNL—Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5566

Emily Eveleth (American, born 1960)
True Story, 2005
Oil on canvas
213.4 x 233.7 cm (84 x 92 in.)
Phil Schragger Collection, Omaha

Janet Fish (American, born 1938)
Preserved Peaches, 1975
Color lithograph
66.2 x 48.6 cm (26 ¼ x 19 ½ in.)
UNL—Thomas P. Coleman Memorial, U-1718

John F. Francis (American, 1808–1886)
Still Life, 1850
Oil on canvas
51.4 x 61 cm (20 ¼ x 24 in.)
NAA—Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-123

Ralph Ladell Goings (American, born 1928)
Pie Case, 1975
Oil on canvas
61 x 86.7 cm (24 x 34 ½ in.)
NAA—Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-340

Kira Greene (American, born Korea, 1964)
Archway to Happiness, 2009
Color pencil and gouache on wood panel
91.4 x 91.4 cm (36 x 36 in.)
UNL—Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust, U-5607

Majja Grotell (American, born Finland, 1899–1973)
Bowl, undated
Ceramic
10.2 x 15.9 x 15.2 cm (4 x 6 ¼ x 6 in.)
UNL—F. M. Hall Collection, H-319

Designed by George Prentiss Kendrick
(American, 1850–1919)
Decorated by Ruth Erickson (active c. 1905)
Made at Grueby Faience Company, Boston,
Massachusetts
Vase, c. 1905
Glazed earthenware
31.8 x 22.9 x 21.6 cm (12 ½ x 9 x 8 ½ in.)
UNL—F. M. Hall Collection, H-2739

Anna Reed Hall (American, 1857–1928)
Fruit, c. 1900
Oil on board
46.4 x 56.5 cm (18 ¼ x 22 ¼ in.)
UNL—F. M. Hall Collection, H-35

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)
Hunter's Corner, 1941/42
Oil on Masonite
22.2 x 76.2 cm (8 ¾ x 30 in.)
UNL—Bequest of Bertha Schaefer, U-819

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)
Peaches, 1927
Silverpoint
51.8 x 42.5 cm (20 ¾ x 16 ¾ in.)
UNL—Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-3111

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)
Still Life with Fan, 1912
Oil on canvas
92.1 x 71.1 cm (36 ¼ x 28 in.)
NAA—Thomas C. Woods Memorial, N-124

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)
Flowers — Blue Background, 1941
Oil on Masonite
69.2 x 54.6 cm (27 ¼ x 21 ½ in.)
UNL—Howard S. Wilson Memorial, U-3112

Martin Johnson Heade (American, 1819–1904)
Oranges and Orange Blossoms, 1883/95
Oil on canvas
31.1 x 50.2 cm (12 ¼ x 19 ¾ in.)
UNL—In loving memory of Beatrice D. Rohman
by Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-4661

John William Hill (American, born England,
1812–1879)
Plums and Apple, 1874
Oil on canvas
25.4 x 20.3 cm (10 x 8 in.)
UNL—Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through
the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5569

Hans Hofmann (American, born Germany,
1880–1966)
Fruit Bowl, 1950
Oil on canvas
75.9 x 96.5 cm (29 ¾ x 38 in.)
NAA—Nebraska Art Association Collection, N-72

Jasper Johns (American, born 1930)
Bread, 1969
Lead with hand coloring
58.4 x 43.2 cm (23 x 17 in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-3085

Larry Johnson (American, born 1935)
Stacked Meat, 1963
Oil on canvas
175.9 x 229.9 cm (69 ¼ x 90 ½ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-894

Otis Kaye (American, 1885–1974)
Dollar Bill, c. 1940
Etching with tempera
6.8 x 15.2 cm (2 11⁄16 x 6 in.)
NAA–Gift of Carl Rohman, N-690

Walt Kuhn (American, 1877–1949)
Apples in Wooden Boat, 1938
Oil on canvas
62.2 x 74.6 cm (24 ½ x 29 ¾ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-203

Yasuo Kuniyoshi (American, born Japan, 1889–1953)
Room 110, 1944
Oil on canvas
110.5 x 85.1 cm (43 ½ x 33 ½ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-252

John La Farge (American, 1835–1910)
Sketch of Wild Duck, 1860
Oil on panel
46.4 x 35.6 cm (18 ¼ x 14 in.)
UNL–Gift of the Lincoln Alumni Chapter
of Delta Delta Delta Sorority, U-431

Luigi Lucioni (American, born Italy, 1900–1988)
Arrangement in White, 1928
Oil on canvas
76.8 x 71.8 cm (30 ¼ x 28 ¼)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-163

Alfred Henry Maurer (American, 1868–1932)
Still Life with Bowl and Yellow Cloth, 1927/28
Oil on panel
45.7 x 54.6 cm (18 x 21 ½ in.)
UNL–Bequest of Bertha Schaefer, U-809

Alfred Henry Maurer (American, 1868–1932)
Still Life with Bowl, c. 1908
Oil on panel
45.7 x 54.9 cm (18 x 21 5⁄8 in.)
UNL–Bequest of Bertha Schaefer, U-810

Vera Mercer (American, born Germany, 1936)
White Goose, 2009
Color photograph
149.9 x 198.1 cm (59 x 78 in.)
UNL–Mercedes A. Augustine Acquisition Trust,
U-5598

Claes Oldenburg (American, born Sweden, 1929)
N.Y.C. Pretzel, 1994
Silkscreened corrugated cardboard
16.5 x 16.5 x 1.6 cm (6 ½ x 6 ½ x 5⁄8 in.)
UNL–University Collection, U-4966.1-.6

Elizabeth Okie Paxton (American, 1877–1971)
At Auction, undated
Oil on canvas
91.4 x 101.6 cm (36 x 40 in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5584

Mary Jane Peale (American, 1827–1902)
Still Life: Apples and Grapes, undated
Oil on canvas
39.1 x 55.9 cm (15 3⁄8 x 22 in.)
NAA–Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-171

Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956)
Untitled [Composition with Ritual Scene], 1938–41
Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite
45.7 x 120 cm (18 x 47 ¼ in.)
NAA–Nebraska Art Association Collection,
through the gifts of Mrs. Henry C. Woods, Sr., Mr.
and Mrs. Frank Woods, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas
C. Woods, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Woods, Jr. by
exchange: Woods Charitable Fund in memory of
Thomas C. (Chip) Woods, III, and other generous
donors, N-767

Levi Wells Prentice (American, 1851–1935)
Still Life with Apples and Cantaloupe, undated
Oil on canvas
30.5 x 45.7 cm (12 x 18 in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5564

Charles Whedon Rain (American, 1911–1985)
Hand of Fate, 1962
Oil on board
8.6 x 13.3 cm (3 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.)
UNL–Gift of Robert C. Reinhart, U-3823

Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925–2008)
Tampa Clay Piece 3, 1972
Ceramic, luster glaze, tape, soil patina
52.4 x 61.6 x 12.5 cm (20 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{19}{16}$ in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-4427

Man Ray (American, 1890–1976)
Cadeau (Gift), 1921; fabricated 1974
Cast iron, tacks
16.5 x 9.8 x 10.5 cm (6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2860

Carducius Plantagenet Ream (American,
1837–1917)
Still Life (Peaches and Grapes), undated
Oil on canvas
41.9 x 52.1 cm (16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through
the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5578

Severin Roesen (American, born Germany, c.
1815–1872)
Still Life with Fruit and Champagne Glass, c. 1872
Oil on canvas
69.2 x 89.5 cm (27 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.)
NAA–Gift of Carl Rohman in memory of Lorraine
LeMar Rohman, N-686

Morton Livingston Schamberg (American,
1881–1918)
Composition, c. 1916
Pastel and graphite on paper
19.4 x 15.2 cm (7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 in.)
NAA–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman, N-694

Haim Steinbach (American, born Israel, 1944)
*Untitled (Halco and Tour d'Argent salt and pepper
shakers)*, 1989
Stainless steel shelf; stainless steel, glass, and
silver salt and pepper shakers
21 x 33 x 8.6 cm (8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)
UNL–F. M. Hall Collection, H-2963.1-5

Toshiko Takaezu (American, born 1922)
Double Spouted Jar, 1955/56
Stoneware
24.1 x 16.5 x 14.6 cm (9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.)
UNL–Bequest of Bertha Schaefer, U-888

Henry Fitch Taylor (American, 1853–1925)
Cubist Still Life, c. 1914
Oil on canvas
70.8 x 88.9 cm (27 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 35 in.)
NAA–Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial, N-282

Wayne Thiebaud (American, born 1920)
Salads, Sandwiches, and Desserts, 1962
Oil on canvas
139.7 x 182.9 cm (55 x 72 in.)
NAA–Thomas C. Woods Memorial, N-138

Frank Tuchfarber (American, active c. 1890)
after William M. Harnett (1848–1892)
The Old Violin, 1887
Chromolithograph on glass
88.6 x 61 cm (34 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 24 in.)
NAA–Gift of Bess Walt in memory of Edward J.
Walt Jr., N-688

Unknown
Still Life with Strawberries, undated
Oil on canvas
35.6 x 50.8 cm (14 x 20 in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through
the University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5562

Designed by Artus Van Briggel (American,
1869–1904)
Lorelei Vase, 1920s
Semivitreous ceramic
24.1 x 11.4 x 10.2 cm (9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 in.)
UNL–Gift of Elizabeth B. Mueller, U-2816

Andrew John Henry Way (American, 1826–1888)
Wild Grapes, c. 1875
Oil on canvas
61.6 x 46 cm (24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
UNL–Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman through the
University of Nebraska Foundation, U-5583

Tom Wesselmann (American, 1931–2004)
Still Life No. 15, 1962
Collage, oil, printed papers, photograph, and
fabric on canvas
214.6 x 183.5 cm (84 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 72 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.)
UNL–Gift of Mrs. Olga N. Sheldon, U-3282

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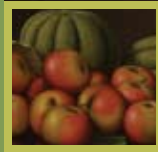
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