

SMALL CORNERS

An "Interiors" Project

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CSU

Concentration Research Project

"For, sensual and sensitive at once,  
he wanted only to show life at its  
most charming; and, better than to  
show it, to suggest it."

Bonnard, Antoine Terrasse  
1964

"The secret force of these intimate  
studies resides in the fidelity of  
the painter to such attitudes, such  
lights, and such rites as are repeated  
like the hours and the seasons."

Vuillard, His Life and Work,  
Roger-Marx, 1888

The impetus for my concentration research project came to me during my final critique, last spring. I remarked how the work of many undergraduates impressed me with its loose, painterly marks, its adventurous use of color, its expressiveness in the face of inexperience. I said I wanted to loosen up, to reach back to my earliest works; to suggest, rather than to state.

At that time, I knew I would spend my summer at Madeline Island, where, in 1910, my family built a wonderful summerhouse. The house is furnished with most of the original furniture; pieces added , bit by bit, by my great-grandmother, Myrtle Ferguson. Painted wooden and metal bedsteads, high bureaus with mirrors, vanities with floral skirts, wicker sofas and petit-point chairs, glass lamps, oriental rugs and chintz draperies, fill the high-ceiling house, built of darkly stained wood, exposed to the inside, with pecan colored tongue and groove walls and ceilings upstairs. The atmosphere is both somber and cheerful, lit by sunlight reflecting from vast and deep Lake Superior. The style of the house recalls the early 20th century, similar to that of interiors painted by Bonnard and Vuillard and many American impressionist and post-impressionist artists.

My goal was to capture the times and the people of the era, specifically my family; the house seemed

to hold a psychological record of their happy summer days. And like Vuillard, I have a "predilection for the ...objects... which, even ~~with~~ the absence of man, are always impregnated with a human essence." (Roger-Marx, 1888)

I attempted a new style of painting; alleviating my usual affinity for precise rendering and local color, I let the shapes of "real things" take on proportion and gesture of their own; I allowed the "spirit" of the house to dictate the use of color, making up those relationships as I progressed.

I utilized acrylic with gel medium, stroking flatly over forms with another color, each time, to create volume, ignoring rigid rules about mid-tones. In many instances I tried to lose the forms of objects, almost entirely, my way of suggesting, thus allowing the viewer to complete the visual meaning. In order to achieve this "suggesting", I looked at many works by Bonnard and Vuillard, masters of exciting color and lost shapes, coming together like collage. I purposefully did not exaggerate my light source, for dramatic effect; and stayed close to the soft, subdued light of the interiors. Both Bonnard and Vuillard were set apart from the impressionist school because their primary interest was not concerned with light. I wanted to rely on vivacious color and naive form to interest my viewer.

An important aspect of my project was to utilize my affinity for personal domestic objects as creative visual source; vases of flowers, lamps, small jars, candlesticks, cloth coverings and more intimate objects, such as a bath tub, a toilet or sink, a bathrobe or hairbrush. I employed reflections in mirrors to reveal more of the interior, to add another dimension, and to further reveal the space around me, hoping to enhance the feeling of presence and intimacy. I was not overly concerned that my viewer enjoy seeing these domestic items, but would be excited by the manner in which I painted them. Nor was I concerned with my viewer's interest in content or narrative; I used personal memories to push me forward with the work. Happily, the Madeline interior project had a life of its own, and the work seemed to flow from the house, through me, on to the canvas, though it was not without technical difficulties. My greatest problem occurred when I found myself lapsing into old patterns of concern about drawing, locating objects in space in relationship to each other, and compositional problems. When I just let go, the work began to flow again.

The second part of the project began in my own house in Fort Collins. The feeling of my house is quite different. The house was built in 1960 and

has a motel like atmosphere. In a sense, the house lacks a spirit of its own, possibly by virtue of its sterile and cheap architecture, and by the fact that I have not lived there long. I had difficulty working in this atmosphere. Fortunately, most of my interiors include objects I have inherited from Myrtle Ferguson, so that aspect helped me to find content with which to imbue the paintings.

I stayed mainly with small corners as my subject matter and composition. In most situations I used artificial lighting, such as lamps and spotlights to create light and atmosphere. I struggled in both phases of this project with severe and awkward space limitations. I was nearly meshed with the objects most of the time.

I attempted to stay close to the painting style of the Madeline project, but in two instances I broke entirely in brushstroke and composition as sort of a "refresher survival tactic". Twice I used mirror reflections to reveal space and once I expanded the pictorial dimension to include the view outside a window. I was continually impressed by the effect the different houses had upon me in terms of style and content.

In general, I profited greatly from the interior project. I learned more about color by sometimes limiting my palette and keying the paintings to one

or two color families, like earth tones, or pastel hues, cool colors or warm colors overall, then adding bright, lively colors as accent. I learned how to scale down my forms, and actually painted large objects and spaces on a small format. All the pieces measure 16x20 inches or less. I am certain that I gained some success in my effort to lose forms of objects, so that some were barely recognizable; at other times, I exaggerated the forms and painted them in extraneous, or arbitrary colors to enhance the color scheme. And I allowed myself to approach this project somewhat decoratively, ignoring sophistication and refinement. I looked for charm in my interiors, and enhanced that aspect as I felt necessary. I wanted my interiors to have personality, humor and naivete.

I am aware that some pieces are more successful than others both visually and in terms of content. I did not attempt to enforce my technical knowledge upon the works, but allowed the character of the interiors to override many formal decisions. I am pleased with the project in general and I learned a great deal from just letting new experience and new ideas happen. My studio work has grown enormously from my decision to suggest rather than to state, and I conclude that the project was a successful endeavor in self-directed learning.

## REFERENCES

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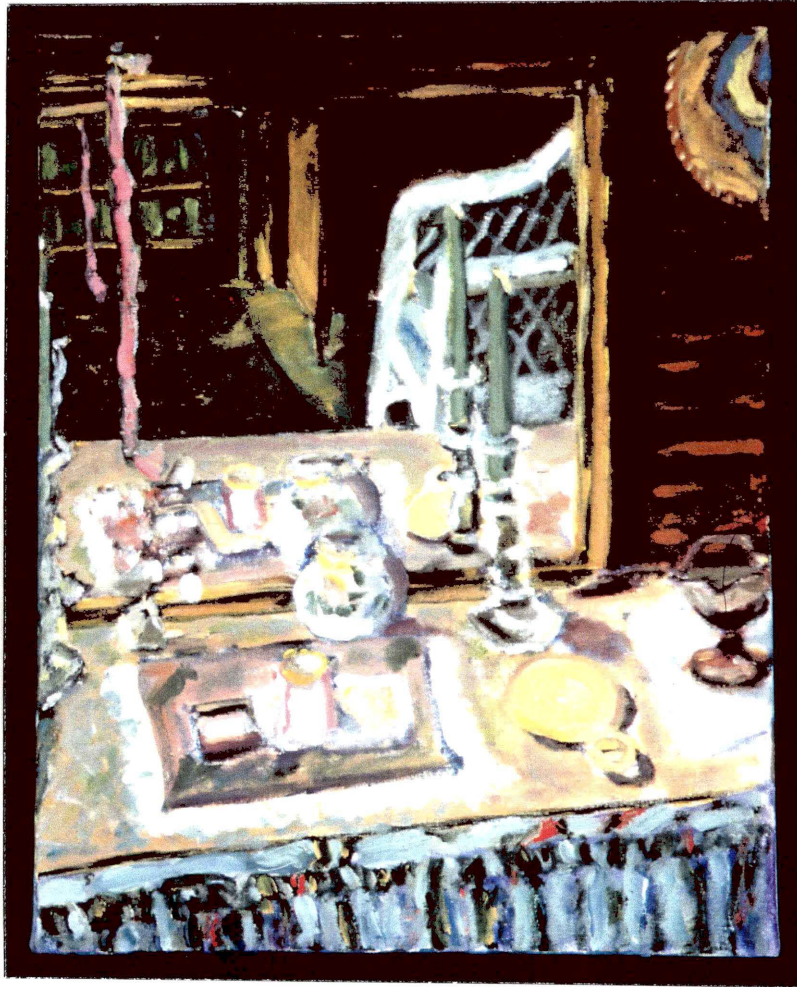
## PAINTINGS

1. Wicker desk, daisies.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16" 1993
2. Pink ribbon, green candle.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20" 1993
3. Bathtub with blue bottle  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20" 1993
4. Green vase, yellow vanity.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20" 1993
5. Hairbrush with bathrobe.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16" 1993
6. Brass bed, blue vase.  
Acrylic on canvas  
11"x16" 1993
7. Red toothbrush, blue toilet.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16" 1993
8. Zinnias with butternut squash.  
Acrylic on canvas  
15½"x15½" 1993
9. Red chilies, blue cup.  
Acrylic on canvas  
14"x18" 1993
10. Purple rug with blue chair.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16" 1993
11. Red geraniums, turquoise lamp.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16" 1993
12. Yellow chairs, red pears.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16½" 1993

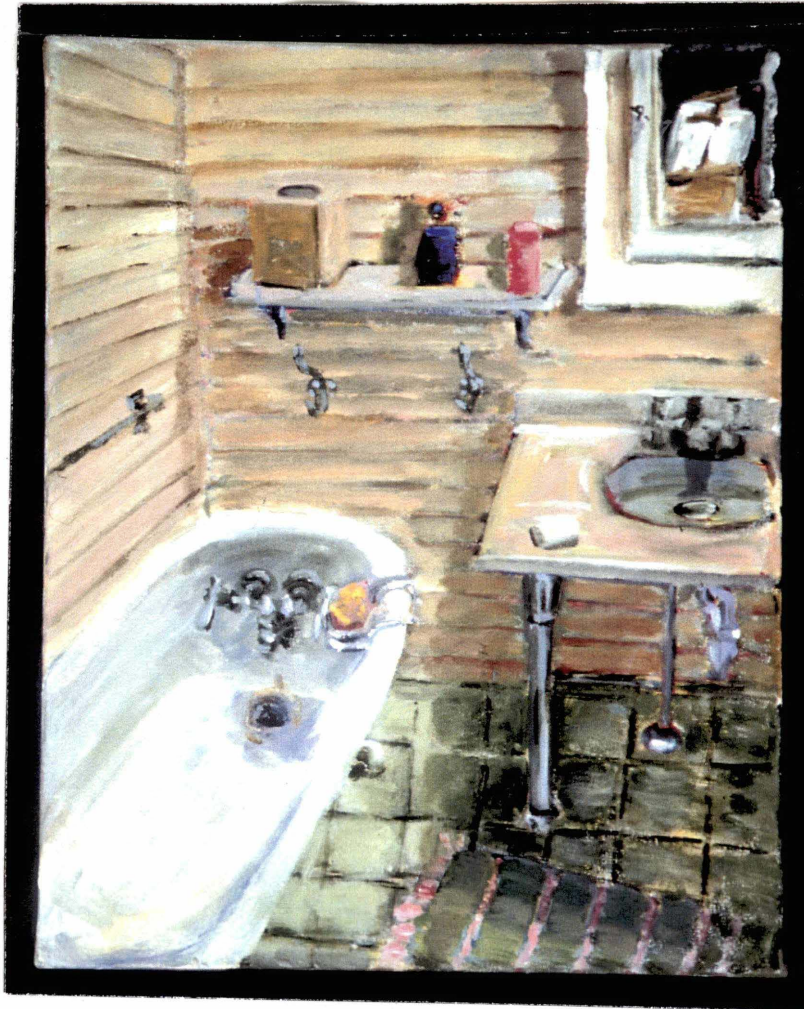
Madeline House



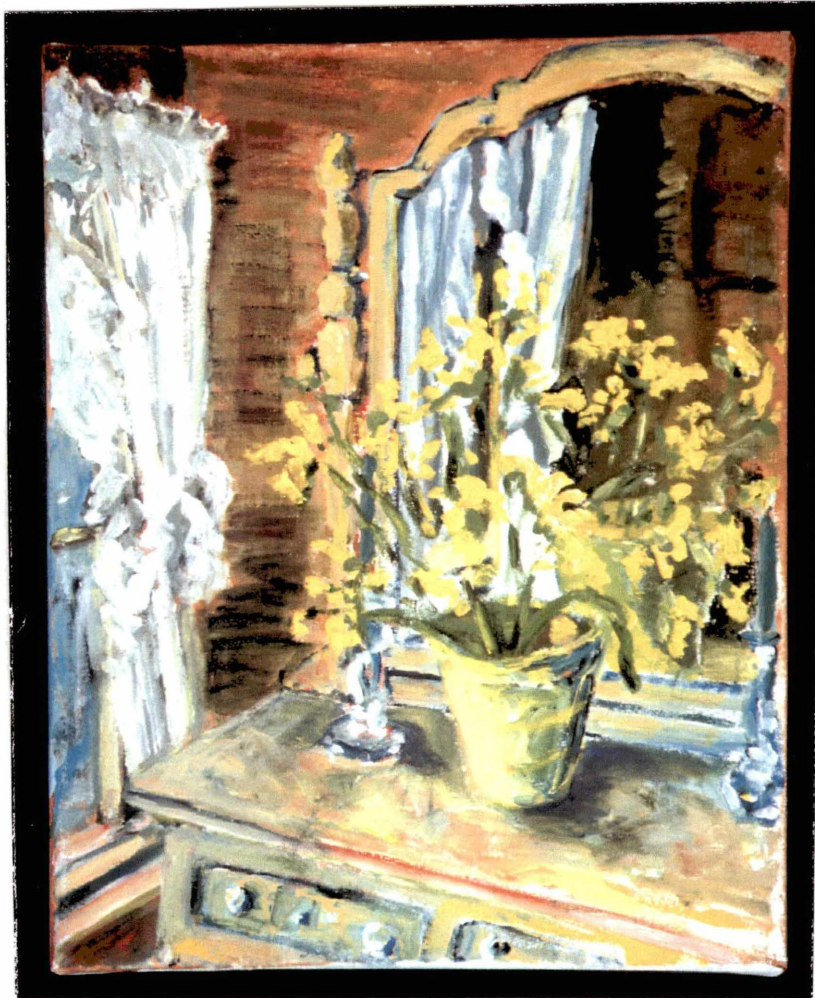
Wicker desk, daisies.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16"



Pink ribbon, green candle.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"



Bathtub with blue bottle.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"

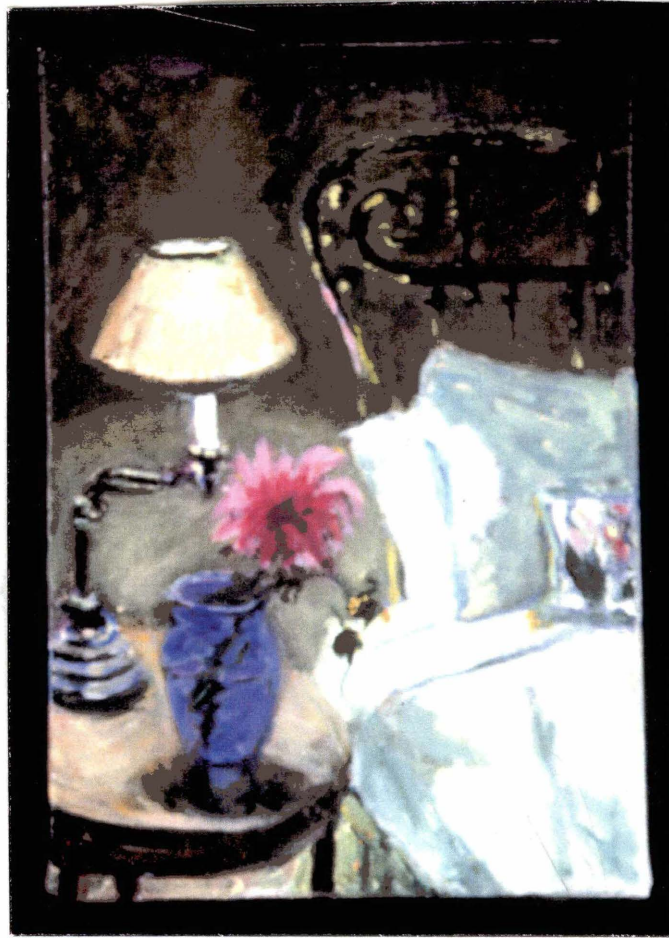


Green vase, yellow vanity.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x20"

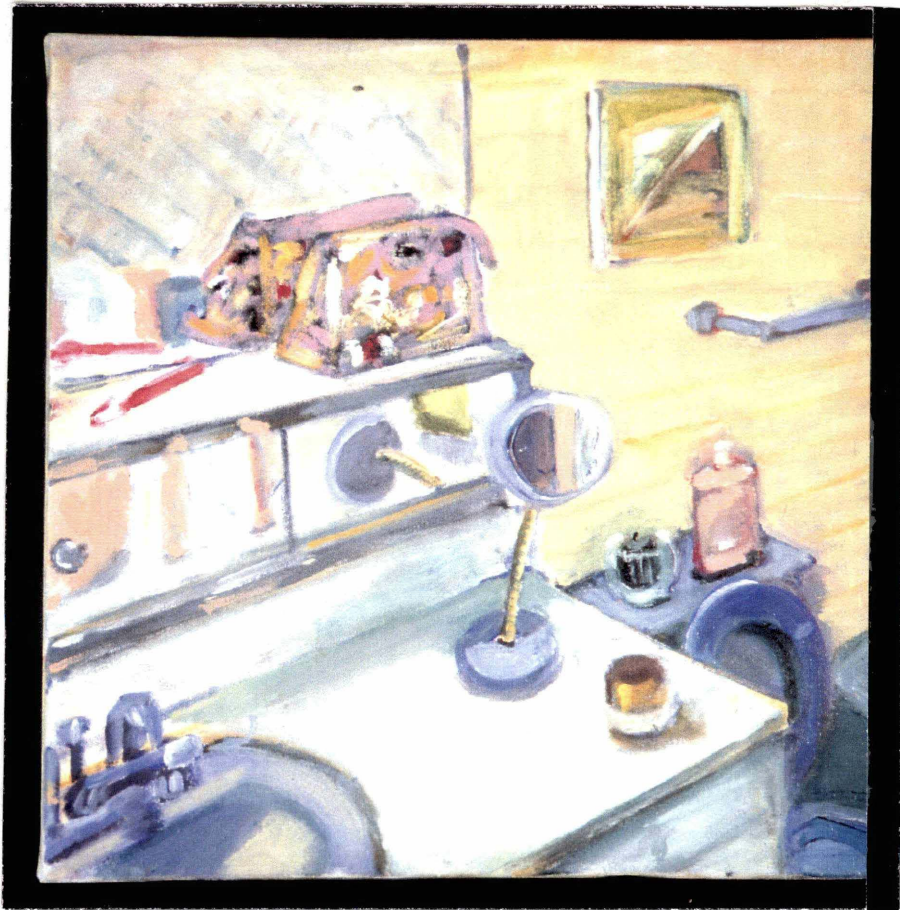


Hairbrush with bathrobe.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16"

Fort Collins House

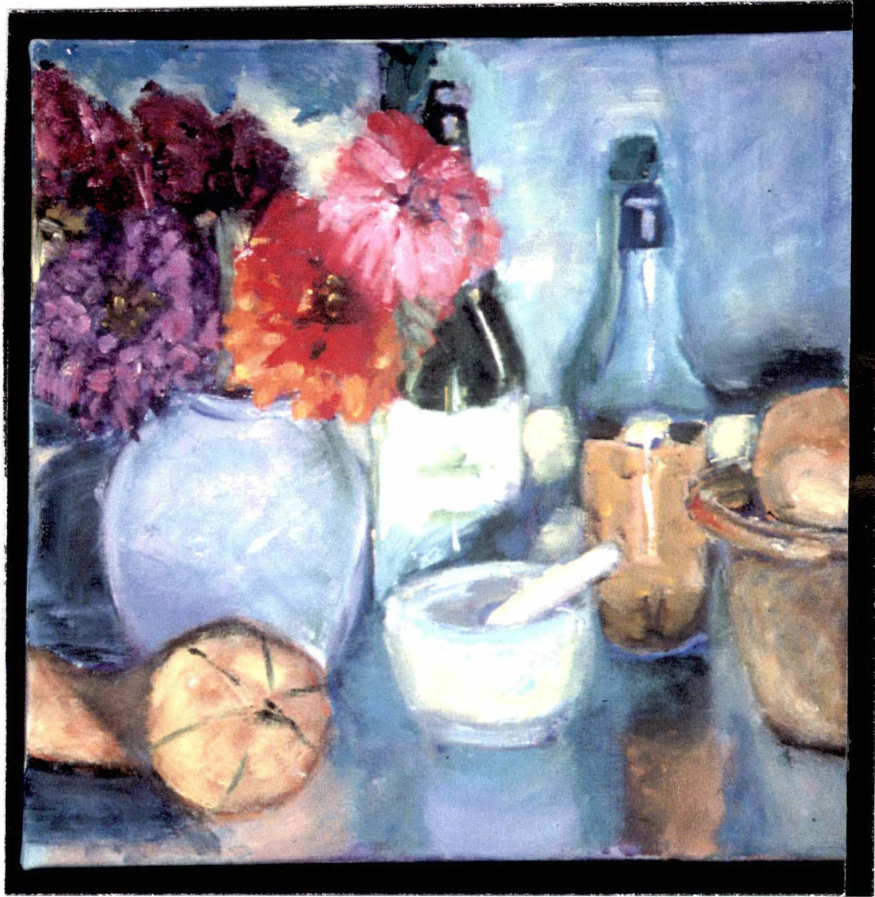


Brass bed, blue vase.  
Acrylic on canvas  
11"x16"



Red toothbrush, blue toilet.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16"





Zinnias with butternut squash.  
Acrylic on canvas  
15½"x15½"



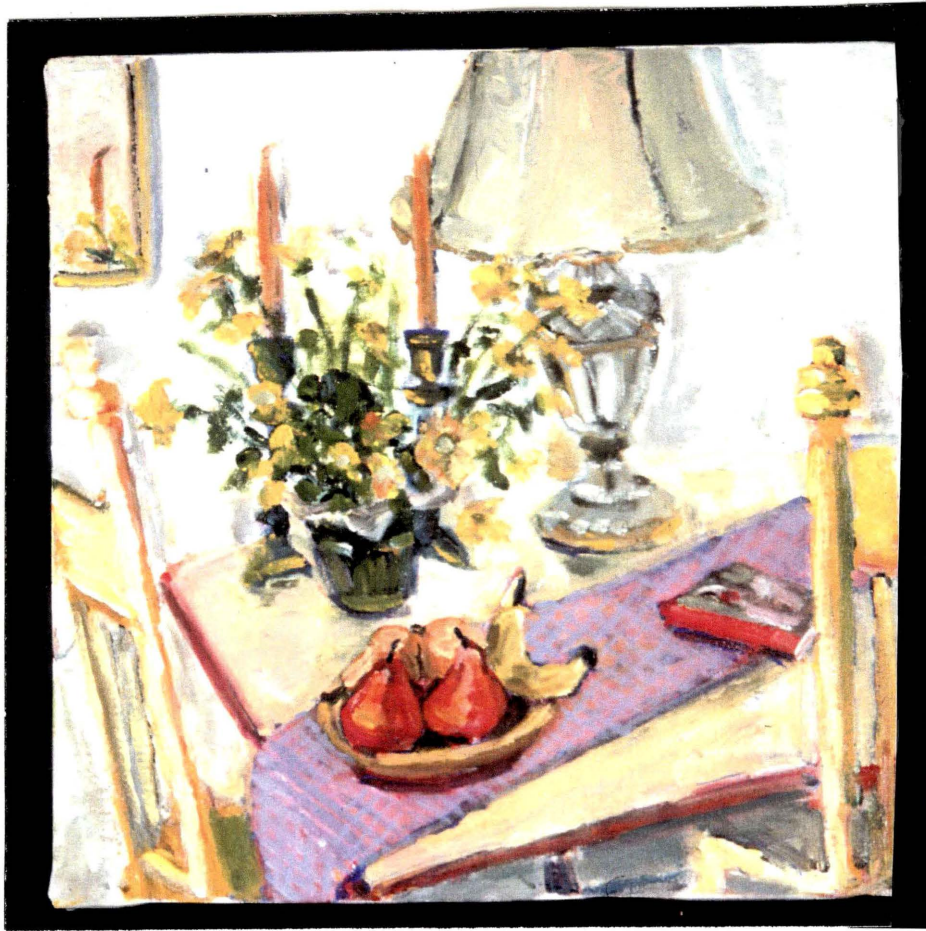
Red chilies, blue cup.  
Acrylic on canvas  
14"x18"



Purple rug with white chair.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16"



Red geraniums, turquoise lamp.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16"



Yellow chairs, red pears.  
Acrylic on canvas  
16"x16½"