

For Immediate Release

STILL LIFE | Then & Now | drawings, prints, paintings & photographs
January 18 - February 25, 2023

VICTORIA MUNROE
fine art

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On view January 18 through February 25, 2023, Victoria Munroe Fine Art is pleased to present STILL LIFE: *Then and Now*, an eclectic selection of works by 25 artists from the 18th to the 21st centuries. In drawing, intaglio, painting and photography, each tabletop composition seems to say, "consider this moment."

The precise arrangements often focus on balance or chaos, perfection or disintegration. Traditional props from the history of the genre appear: compotes of grapes and gooseberries, bouquets of flowers, glass carafes, dying roses, walnuts, butterflies, squirrels, slabs of meat, stacks of papers or cut diamonds, all positioned as if on a stage.

These still lifes carry us into the private worlds of artists and photographers for whom tabletop arrangements offer a focus on time suspended. While the 18th and 19th century still lifes reveal a reverential observation of nature in harmonious compositions, Marsden Hartley's (1877-1943) black lithograph of a goblet stuffed with iconic flower shapes alarms with its intensity and jagged gestures. Duncan Grant's 1912 (1885-1978) all-over patterned still life of a vase of flowers with flying parrots is a dazzling composition for which he invented quilted blossoms.

Many still lifes are composed in the dark. Ludovic-Napolean Lepic's (1839-1889) etching of fresh eels gleam in a rope basket on the beach at night. By coincidence, the contemporary Chinese American artist Han Feng (b. 1962) photographed a single eel on her kitchen table late at night during the COVID-19 lockdown. Printed in rich archival pigments, her still lifes have a theatrical air.

The earliest paintings in the show are a pair of intimate kitchen still lifes by the renowned botanical painter Barbara Regina Dietzsch (1706-1783). Dietzsch's miniature still lifes appear out of the dark with glazed storage jugs, cabbages and artichokes fresh from the garden. The accompanying painting, presenting a mound of eleven dead birds – owl, partridge and pheasant – is a poignant still life of limp feathers and the fact of death.

Nocturnal still lifes also attracted Czech photographers Jaromir Funke (1896-1945) and Josef Sudek (1896-1976) who seem to have hunted in their dark studios for found still lifes illuminated by flashlight. Discarded glass plate negatives and empty vases create transparent still lifes in the geometric compositions that defined modern photography. By contrast, centuries later, Bruce Kurland's (1938- 2013) recent surreal still lifes also present fresh meat and fish, now wrapped in plastic and balanced precariously on a tin bowl. Kurland's *Soft Shell Crab + Pot* is equally absurd in its depiction of a life size blue crab holding on to a Japanese tea pot. His *Can of Blue Irises* seems to be a mime performance.

Sachiko Morita (b. 1973) grows her still life subjects in Angers, France, where she prints unique images in her dark room with a painterly application of the emulsion. Stems of Lily of the Valley, stalks of rhubarb and Mirabelle plums are printed smaller than life size images of earthly perfection. Charles Jones (1866-1959) was also a grower who photographed his produce as still lifes of perfect crops for an estate in Sussex. He positioned ripe pea pods open with the fresh peas glowing within.

Alexander Liberman's (1912-1999) circa 1949 photograph of Matisse's studio captures a still life painting in progress on the master's easel. Amidst the elegant chaos of the painter's props and materials, a casual still life of pomegranates, peaches and a potted fern is arranged on a marble table. The still life appears twice: in life and in the painting of life.

A group of photographs by Bauhaus students record assignments for projects and become found still lifes. In 1927, Heinz Loew (1903-1981) made the gelatin silver print of an intriguing sculptural object created in the plastic workshop. Gertrud Arndt (1903 -2000) photographed a silver bowl filled with fruit in the metals class. Lotte Beese (1903-1988) photographed a colleague laying out her design for a project using reflecting metal discs strewn across her worktable. Edmund Colleijn (1906-1992) recorded his tiny paper model for a structures project assigned by Josef Albers.

These still lifes are evidence that the idiom never ceases to lose meaning nor the attention from artists.

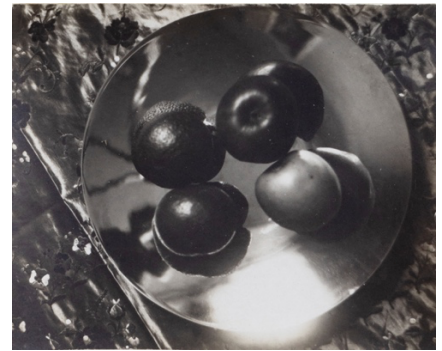
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Josef Sudek (1896-1976)
Still Life with Glass, c. 1930s



Duncan Grant (1885-1978)
Design for Firescreen, 1912



Gertrud Arndt (1903-2000)
Still Life with Silver Bowl, c. 1930



Sachiko Morita (b. 1973)
Mirabelle, 2021



Alexander Liberman (1912-1999)
Matisse's studio, c. 1949



Barbara Regina Dietzsch (1706-1783)
Still life with game, exotic birds, 18th century



Han Feng (b. 1962)
The Gift II: Peonies, 2021



Ludovic-Napoleon Lepic (1839-1889)
Fish and Eels in a Basket (after Jadin), 1862



Bruce Kurland (1938-2013)
Blue irises in tin can, purple radichio, 1986