

THESIS

STILL LIFE PAINTINGS

Submitted by
Leah Martine Bradley
Art Department


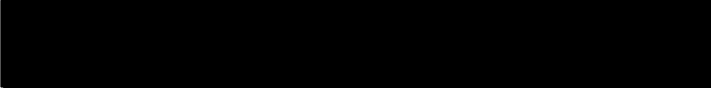
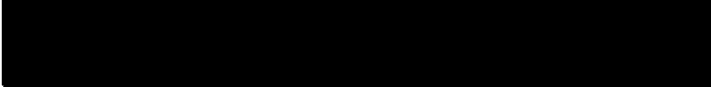


In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
Spring 1991

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

December 6, 1990

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY LEAH M. BRADLEY ENTITLED STILL LIFE PAINTINGS
BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work





Adviser


Department Head

ABSTRACT OF THESIS
STILL LIFE PAINTINGS

My paintings speak of order, energy, and at times, of magic. These are phenomena that I sense in nature and in the patterns and rhythms of daily life. I choose to paint simple household objects for their multiple personal associations and for their associations with women's lives and women's work. When I remove a few of these objects from the general clutter and honor them with their own space and light, I celebrate the innate value and beauty of the objects, as well as their use in every day life. The quiet simplicity of the objects, and their stable, careful arrangement also make connections for me between the order of daily life and the grander order of nature. When I surround paintings with fabricated borders, the images feel charged by the livelier energy of the borders. Like icons, the objects within are enclosed and enshrined, and the pieces as a whole have a charm-like or magical quality. Thus my paintings also refer to the sacredness of the repeated patterns of daily chores and to the sense of order that make our lives possible and give them meaning.

Leah Martine Bradley
Art Department
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Co. 80523
Spring 1991

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Plates	v
Thesis Statement	1
Plates	6

LIST OF PLATES

Plate		Page
1	<u>The Breakfast Table</u> , oil on canvas, 20" x 24"	7
2	<u>Red Bowl</u> , oil on canvas, 14" x 12"	8
3	<u>Pinchpot and Gourd</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on wood, 17-1/2" x 15-1/2"	9
4	<u>Red Pears</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic and paper on wood, 17" x 14-3/4"	10
5	<u>Pinchpot and Measuring Cup</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic and paper on wood, 17-1/2" x 15-1/2"	11
6	<u>Sugar Bowl and Wallpaper</u> , oil on canvas and clay, 20-1/2" x 22" x 1-1/4"	12
7	<u>Sugar Bowl and Oil Cup</u> , oil on canvas, 14" x 12"	13
8	<u>Animal and Crab Applies</u> , oil on canvas, 10" x 12"	14
9	<u>Apricots on Fish Print</u> , oil on canvas, 15-1/4" x 13-1/8"	15
10	<u>Measuring Cups</u> , oil on canvas, 14" x 12"	16
11	<u>Green Pears on Platter</u> , oil on canvas, 20" x 16"	17
12	<u>Yellow Pear</u> , oil on canvas, 10" x 12"	18
13	<u>Spanish Plate with Crab Apples</u> , oil on canvas, 16" x 15"	19
14	<u>Red Bowl of Peaches</u> , oil on canvas, 15" x 14"	20
15	<u>Egg Cups</u> , oil on canvas, 12" x 10"	21
16	<u>Cylinders and Lemon</u> , oil on canvas, 15" x 14"	22
17	<u>Still Life with Pitcher and Pencil Sharpener</u> , oil on canvas, 14" x 10"	23

18	<u>Plums on White Plate</u> , oil on canvas, 11" x 10" . . .	24
19	<u>Indian Teacups</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 15-1/2" x 13-1/2"	25
20	<u>Blue Cup Kitchen Charm</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 13" x 12"	26
21	<u>Measuring Spoons Kitchen Charm</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 13" x 12-1/2"	27
22	<u>China Cup and Saucer</u> , oil on canvas, 10" x 12" . . .	28
23	<u>Bowl with Apple in Landscape</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 13-1/4" x 11-1/2"	29
24	<u>Green Plums on Plate</u> , oil on canvas, fabric and acrylic on wood, 19-1/2" x 21-1/2"	30
25	<u>Red Bowl with Hands</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 16-1/2" x 14-1/4"	31
26	<u>Measuring Cup on Indian Print</u> , oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 16-1/2" x 14-1/2"	32
27	<u>Cup on Potholder</u> , oil on canvas, 12" x 10"	33

THESIS STATEMENT

My paintings speak of order, energy, and, at times, of magic. These are phenomena that I sense in nature and in all of life. The process of painting affords me a way of incorporating these in my own visual language and of making connections between them and the patterns, rhythms, and order of my own life and of women's lives in general.

Simple household objects such as measuring cups, a single teacup, a bowl with fruit in it, or even a single piece of fruit, might seem to be too humble to embody these themes. Yet it is precisely their humility which captures me and renders them so eloquent. The simplicity and clarity of their forms, their comfortable "holdable" size, and their familiar, homey associations make them rich with expressive possibilities. Many of the objects have very personal meaning or memories associated with them. The china cup and saucer and the egg cups were painted by my grandmother, Ludi Bonnet Houck, who was a very fine china painter. Others, such as the blue cup and saucer, the sugar bowl, and the measuring cups and spoons also belonged to her. I treasure these because she used them, over and over again, as did my mother, and now myself. For me, the measuring cups and spoons in particular have become imbued with the quiet meaning and value that comes

from the repeated pattern of their use in the daily chores of sustenance. I feel that by removing a few of these objects from the general clutter and honoring them with their own space and light, I am able to celebrate these simple aspects of every day life and to make connections between these and the grander order of nature.

It is my intention that all of the paintings express a sense of order, whether it be a purely sensual calm, or a balance of still simplicity and intense activity. On the one hand I would describe this sense of order as having to do with the basic underlying order of nature, with its simple patterns and patient cycles. This sense of quiet stability is often of special concern in those paintings that do not have fabricated borders. The simple color harmonies and balanced, stable compositions of Measuring Cups, Cylinders and Lemon, and Egg Cups, express for me some of the sureness and reliability of the order and patterns of nature, such as the cycle of seasons or the necessary, meaningful spacing of trees in a forest. At the same time, I try to encourage a sense of energy and life in the images. I pay careful attention to the placement of objects in relation to one another and to the space surrounding them. In some paintings such as Egg Cups and Sugar Bowl and Oil Cup, a strong relationship exists, pushing and pulling, between the paired objects. Similarly, when a single object is isolated in space, as in Red Bowl, the resulting intensity of its presence lends it a sense of vitality and strength beyond the ordinary. The painted

objects sometimes feel almost monumental, and function as examples or embodiments of the order described above.

On the other hand, the sense of order also has to do with the liveliness of nature--the intricate and the grand patterns that at first glance appear to be random, and with the magical or mystical aspects of life. An example of this might be the pattern of leaves on the ground in the autumn. They may have fallen at random, yet they are part of the larger rhythm of the continual life and death cycle of the tree, of the seasons, and beyond that, of the whole earth. This other, more spirited feeling is something with which I am concerned in all of the paintings, and which I especially try to capture and to use when I enclose some paintings in fabricated borders.

The borders function in a number of ways. They at once contrast and harmonize with the images they enclose. Some of them exude a lively intensity which compliments the much more studied, quiet mood of the paintings, as in Red Pears. Others echo and intensify the patterns and colors that are in the paintings, as in Measuring Cup on Indian Print and Red Bowl With Hands. The borders of Green Plums on Plate, Pinchpot and Gourd, and Pinchpot and Measuring Cup relate to their images in that they abstract, in some sense, the essence of the images, and then return it , intensified.

All of the borders are intended to charge the images with their energy. The energy comes in part from the process of creating them which is both additive--using a multiplicity of

materials and techniques--and intuitive. That is, when I make the borders, I trust myself to respond to the images in an intuitive way, drawing on a kind of gut energy with which to charge the images. The result is that the images or painted objects often seem to be sanctified by their surroundings. Like icons, they are enclosed and enshrined by their borders.

A number of the borders are made with baker's clay, a salt and flour dough mounted on masonite. Making these borders involves what feels like a very appropriate "homecoming" of my art work. I mix, roll out and shape the dough in my kitchen, and then "bake" it in my oven. This means that the bread dough borders can be no larger than my oven. Such a purely practical restraint on the creation of "fine art" also feels ironically appropriate. In fact, all of the borders, but especially those of baker's clay, begin to blur the boundaries between fine art and craft or women's work.

Two paintings in particular, Blue Cup Kitchen Charm and Measuring Spoons Kitchen Charm, embody the integration of painting with actual and conceptual craft or women's work, and with magic. The small, homey images feel especially precious, surrounded as they are by the lavish borders that repeat an intensified version of the patterns in the images. The blue cup and measuring spoons seem sanctified by their surroundings, and the pieces as a whole have a charm-like or charged, magical quality. In fact, this is perhaps the essential difference between those paintings that have borders

and those that do not. All of the paintings are expressions of the value, both personal and inherent, of the still life objects, and all of them refer to something beyond themselves. Yet, I feel that the paintings with borders become precious, meaningful, and sometimes magical objects in and of themselves.

Although all of the paintings are responses to these feelings of order and to the importance and beauty of simple things, they are also visual and tactile responses to the lusciousness and expressive qualities of the oil paint itself. Much of the "personality" of the paintings derives from my manner of stroking the paint and of using color. Though developed over time, my own particular way of handling the paint in response to what I am feeling and seeing is very personal, and is basically intuitive.

In the way that in nature, one small plot of ground is the whole ecosystem in microcosm, so these paintings and the process of creating them are like microcosms of the layers of pattern and order that I sense within my own nature and life. When I paint, I feel that I participate in this order, and in the energy and magic of life, from its most simple expressions, to the most sacred.

PLATES



Plate 1. The Breakfast Table, oil on canvas, 20" x 24".



Plate 2. Red Bowl, oil on canvas, 14" x 12".



Plate 3. Pinchpot and Gourd, oil on canvas, acrylic on wood, 17-1/2" x 15-1/2".



Plate 4. Red Pears, oil on canvas, acrylic and paper on wood, 17" x 14-3/4".



Plate 5. Pinchpot and Measuring Cup, oil on canvas, acrylic and paper on wood, 17-1/2" x 15-1/2".



Plate 6. Sugar Bowl and Wallpaper, oil on canvas and clay, 20-1/2" x 22" x 1-1/4".



Plate 7. Sugar Bowl and Oil Cup, oil on canvas, 14" x 12".



Plate 8. Animal and Crab Applies, oil on canvas, 10" x 12".



Plate 9. Apricots on Fish Print, oil on canvas, 15-1/4" x 13-1/8"



Plate 10. Measuring Cups, oil on canvas, 14" x 12".



Plate 11. Green Pears on Platter, oil on canvas, 20" x 16".



Plate 12. Yellow Pear, oil on canvas, 10" x 12".



Plate 13. Spanish Plate with Crab Apples, oil on canvas, 16"
x 15"



Plate 14. Red Bowl of Peaches, oil on canvas, 15" x 14".



Plate 15. Egg Cups, oil on canvas, 12" x 10".



Plate 16. Cylinders and Lemon, oil on canvas, 15" x 14".



Plate 17. Still Life with Pitcher and Pencil Sharpener, oil on canvas, 14" x 10".



Plate 18. Plums on White Plate, oil on canvas, 11" x 10".



Plate 19. Indian Teacups, oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 15-1/2" x 13-1/2".



Plate 20. Blue Cup Kitchen Charm, oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 13" x 12".



Plate 21. Measuring Spoons Kitchen Charm, oil on canvas,
acrylic on baker's clay, 13" x 12-1/2"



Plate 22. China Cup and Saucer, oil on canvas, 10" x 12".



Plate 23. Bowl with Apple in Landscape, oil on canvas,
acrylic on baker's clay, 13-1/4" x 11-1/2".



Plate 24. Green Plums on Plate, oil on canvas, fabric and acrylic on wood, 19-1/2" x 21-1/2".



Plate 25. Red Bowl with Hands, oil on canvas, acrylic on baker's clay, 16-1/2" x 14-1/4".



Plate 26. Measuring Cup on Indian Print, oil on canvas,
acrylic on baker's clay, 16-1/2" x 14-1/2".



Plate 27. Cup on Potholder, oil on canvas, 12" x 10".