



STILL LIFE LIVES!

MORE THAN JUST A BOWL OF CHERRIES

"Still Life Lives!" features current trends in still life as an art form and also highlights work from the Fitchburg Art Museum's permanent collection. "I put works together that seem to have conversations with each other," said curator Mary Tinti, who enthusiastically met me at the door for a guided tour of the exhibit. "Things that are connected both visually and thematically."

We started in the foyer, which included three works by museum founder Eleanor Norcross (1854-1923): "Art Nouveau," a painting of a collection of art glass and objects of the period, along with two "Untitled" paintings that show her love of the decorative arts, depicting fine china,

a porcelain clock, ginger jars and vases. The objects in the paintings are not arranged as though carefully positioned for a still life, but rather are lined up with space between them in a curio setting; perhaps they were from her own collections.

In contrast, another wall featured the photography of Kimberly Witham. The photos are intimate tablescapes with a little something you wouldn't expect: most have a small, creatively posed animal as part of the composition. But how did Witham get these animals to pose? The secret, as it turns out, is that the animals are deceased. No, she didn't kill them. They were collected from

nature in their present condition and repurposed as art.

"The juxtaposition of the dead animal to the tapestry, wallpaper and carefully arranged dish ware is a play on the stills you might see in a Martha Stewart magazine," Tinti said. It's a reminder of the mortality of life. "Still Life with a Mouse" is one of the most striking of the eight photographs. It's composed of white objects: milk glass, cupcake papers, funnels and Styrofoam cups, making a dramatic backdrop for the mouse in the foreground with his legs in the air, a sight that would send many a stereotypical housewife running.

As we continue, the work in the room

Tara Sellios, *Impulses*,
Untitled No. 2, 2013, ed. 2,
digital C-print, 50" x 40"
(each panel).

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on the left contains light, color and sweetness. The anchor of this room fills a large raspberry sherbet-colored wall. "An Apple a Day," an installation by Elisa H. Hamilton, captures my attention with 365 mixed-media works on paper. The drawings and paintings are attached to the wall with binder clips and silver pushpins, neatly lined up on a grid to display a calendar full of possible ways to re-interpret a single apple. Walt Kuhn's (1877-1949) "Apples in a Bowl" (1934), a traditional still life, is strategically placed on a floating wall facing the installation, an example of Tinti's plan to show connections to the permanent collection.

Next we see a delicious painting by Emily Eveleth. "Snake Eyes," a very large oil canvas with two fresh jelly donuts stacked in the center. They are painted in a most appetizing way, and then I realize the two form the head of a snake. The jelly hole on the top donut forms an eye, and the bottom hole forms a tongue. The mouth appears between the stack.

Aaron Fink's "Blueberry Pie" is next, a traditional subject but pleasingly abstracted as only Fink can do, painted with dripping blueberry filling on the surface so the top crust peeks through. Even though the painting itself might not quickly read as a pie, the abstraction makes me salivate.

STILL LIFE EXPLODES

By now, I've decided that this is a very unusual still life exhibition. I approach Justin Rockwell's "Volatile Mixture," which is only still if you consider the instant this arrangement is captured in time. Household items of cut and collaged gouache on paper are caught in the midst of an explosion. Someone used the wrong ingredients in the kitchen. A bit of humor is added in with smoke and flames.

The next room has a completely different feel, in both color and subject matter. The work reminds us of the "impermanence, seriousness and the weight of knowing life are fleeting. The tone shifts," said Tinti.

Randal Thurston's "The Great Piece of Turf," a dramatic installation of cut black paper, trails up the wall with its growing

tendrils and dark flowers. Thurston has taken great care to attach the paper so that it is NOT a flat black and white surface. Like a real vine, portions are holding the wall while it twists and moves

porary works are flowers that have been artfully frozen in a thin layer of ice. Kocol then takes the ice outside and photographs them with natural lighting that adds the color of the sky while

John Chervinsky, *Paintings on Guitar*, 2012, archival inkjet print (left); and *Apples, Painting on Door*, 2011, archival inkjet print (Photo by Alexandra Moore).



away from the wall, adding a layer of depth as it casts grey shadows beneath the cut paper. The gallery lighting really intensifies this effect.

Also keeping with the black and white theme is Shelley Reed's "Ribbioned Flowers, Ribbioned Fruit (After Mignon?)" painting. Reed works exclusively in greyscale. "Her inspiration is finding small reproductions of obscure paintings in art books and focusing on a detail, making it the subject of the new canvas," Tinti said. The classic work of Abraham Mignon is recreated with a fresh perspective.

Judy Haber's purses in cast rubber are a topic of conversation. Three purses, named "Hidden Agendas 1, 4 and 5," explore the dark side with a feminine twist. The rubber can be described as somewhere between translucent and transparent, revealing the contents within – two handguns, a grenade and pearl necklaces.

→ Stunning is a word to describe Mary Kocol's photographs. These contem-



backlighting the flower petals, resulting in a frosty, bubbly composition of color.

John Chervinsky's still life photography utilizes the process of removing a section

Kimberly Witham, *Still Life with Goldfinch, Bleeding Heart and Tulip*, 2011, digital c-print, 20" x 20".



Kathleen Volp, *Wan-li Rumble*, 2008, mixed media, oil, aluminum on panel (left); and *Still Life with Imposter and Wan-li*, 2008, mixed media, oil, aluminum on panel (Photo by Alexandra Moore).

of a photo which is then sent to a factory in China where it is translated into an oil painting. Then the sections are positioned into the still life to be photographed again. "Paintings on Guitar" is the result, a still-life photo of a guitar with a Picasso flavor.

I wish I could go on, as there is so much more. "Still Life Lives!" sets the pace for an extensive exhibition, exploring every interpretation of the still life genre. It runs through January 12 and is well worth the trip, and you shouldn't hesitate to bring your young ones, as the museum's new Learning Lounge offers interactive things for your kids to do if they need a break during your visit.

| James Dymont

Whistler House Museum of Art



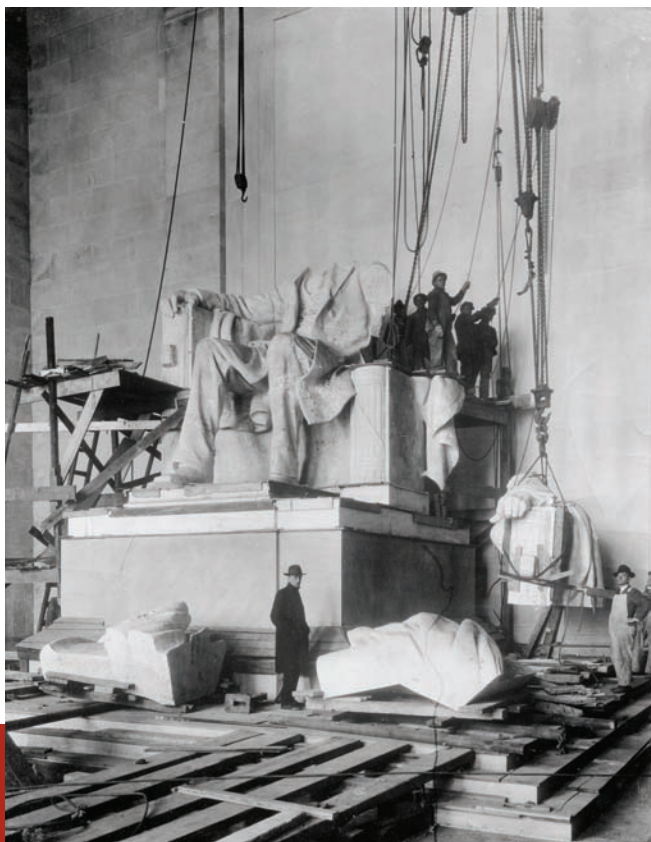
Bountiful Flowers, 16x20" oil by Jennifer McCalmont

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Courtesy Chapin Library, Williams College

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