

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Painting Everyday Objects in All Their Glory

by Patrick Neal on September 16, 2015



Susan Jane Walp, "Green Grapes in a Turquoise Teacup II" (2013), oil on gessoed paper, 7 1/2 x 8 inches (courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery)

Painting reached a turning point with Paul Cézanne wherein a picture would no longer be conceived simply as a window onto the world with the artist at a remove from the act of creating. Working from direct observation of life whether as portrait, still life or landscape, Cézanne emphasized the artifice of the planar canvas and brute matter of paint as vehicles for laying bare his own sensations and thought processes. He did away with the space between creator and creation, absorbing his ideas and sensibility into a work's facture.

The painter Susan Jane Walp could be an heir to this tradition. Her sensibility as a painter and the paintings she makes feel resolutely bound together, drawing the viewer in with their conviction. On view at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Walp's new works in oil on gessoed paper, portray simple still life items resting on a surface. Working with a tamped down tonal palette, her vases and bowls with spiral grooves and funneled spouts, bring to mind Giorgio Morandi's modest abutments

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

of a few tabletop objects. Without the torpid haze of Morandi, Walp's objects are more crystalline and sharp even with chalky pallors, a bit like snapshots lifted from a Pompeian fresco.



Susan Jane Walp, "Tea Bowl, Photocopy, Cork, and Knife" (2015), oil on gessoed paper, 9 1/8 x 10 1/8 inches (courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery)

It is pleasurable to take in Walp's paintings and consider the formal decisions she makes in relation to the conceptual project at hand. How she relates the size of the paper to the objects being depicted with figure and ground abstracting into colored shapes, or how she dematerializes the objects while staying true to their unique peculiarities. One notes her touch and how she applies the medium, sometimes smudgy or thinned to an exact viscosity in order to capture the air, weight, and character of a crisply folded cloth, stem on a bunch of grapes or the space between table legs.

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

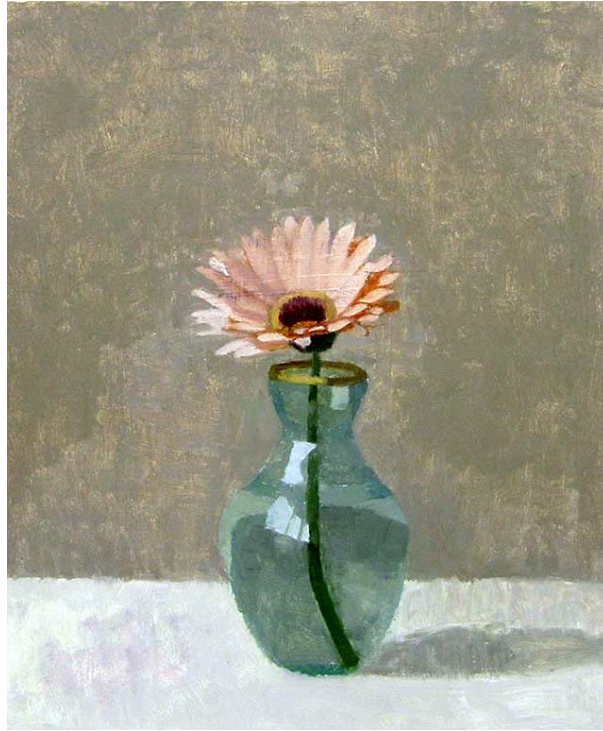


Susan Jane Walp, "Three Zinnias in a Glass of Water" (2012), oil on gessoed paper, 9 3/4 x 9 3/8 inches (courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery)

Walp's paintings are small and meditative, keyed around a few muted colors, a green grey, ochre, dusky blue, occasionally with a pop of bright orange when the subject is a zinnia or tangerine. The presentation is as important as the distinct objects; where objects land on the table and how they mark space, or their material being — if they are heavy or paper thin, transparent, draped, pleated. Most of the compositions are frontal but with a few she hovers overhead, all are grounded at the 90 degree angle where tabletop meets wall. Walp will flatten out a flower but with a few deft touches divulge the staggered petals circling around the stem in space. She'll abstract a vase into blocks of colored bits that represent a waterline, highlights on refracted glass, or the thin gold line around a rim.

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950



Susan Jane Walp, "Gerbera I" (2014), oil on gessoed paper, 11 1/2 x 10 inches (courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery)



Scott Brodie, "Pink Bag with Black Border" (1999), oil on canvas, 16 x 22 inches

When Walp chooses and arranges a knife, newsprint photocopy, bar of soap or cork, I imagine her thinking isn't much different from Scott Schnepf, another painter of household still life objects. Schnepf appears to pluck and place things he's found squirreled away among kitchen cabinets and countertops. As if in homage to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, both artists imbue these quotidian

doodads with a magical other worldliness as if transported from their workaday ordinariness.

Scott Brodie is another artist who is able to find the extraordinary in plain old everyday items; what we eat and wear, tools we use, books we read, shrubs on the side of the road. He notices what is lying around the house or what we blindly walk past on a neighborhood street and injects something of himself into the process. In his retrospective upstate, at Albany Center Gallery, he paints these objects with a respectful nonchalance, often with a diaristic flair — the things of domestic life becoming grist for art.



Scott Brodie, "Corner Pile" (1997), oil on canvas, 26 x 30 inches (courtesy Albany Center Gallery)

Brodie moves from one body of work to another changing his focus of interest without adhering to any stylistic straight-jacket or "look." In a manner akin to how different events and interests cross our paths in life, the themes and motifs he explores revolve cyclically. The work may be from direct observation, a photograph, a preliminary sketch tied to memory but it is all rooted in having one's feet on the ground and observing the things that inhabit our daily routines.

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950



Scott Brodie, "Syringa Vulgaris at 74 Willet St." (2003), oil on canvas, 44 x 38 inches (courtesy Albany Center Gallery)

What holds all of his work together is a muscular painterly touch and a depth and breadth knowledge of Modernism. Brodie is able to harness all sorts of painterly conventions at will, easily crossing the line between figuration or abstraction depending on the shape, scale and emotional tenor of a given project. The show is a veritable celebration of painterly painting culled from the rounds of day-to-day activities. Paintings of bright, mall-like shopping bags riff on hard-edged abstraction and the canvas support itself. Pictures of food served as entrees and side dishes are presented through the many patterned veneers of pop culture or like selfies and thought bubbles floating in the ether of social media. Aluminum foil and packets of artificial sweetener appear larger than life like sensual Op Art modules.

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950



Installation view of 'Scott Brodie, Then & Now: Retrospective' at Albany Center Gallery

For several years Brodie has been painting from the landscape, traveling to Pompeii and Herculaneum, Italy; Dogtown and Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Suzhou, China capturing in bold blocky detail the celebrated rock formations unique to these cities. His recent *Mojave Desert* paintings done on site in Joshua Tree National Park, California are a highlight of the exhibition; large, lyrical compositions of cliffs and boulders that all but dissolve into fields writhing and swelling with lambent reds and oranges.



Scott Brodie, "Desert Rocks" (2014), oil on canvas, 42 x 54 inches (courtesy Albany Center Gallery)

Both Walp and Brodie fit the description of the critic [Jed Perl's](#) ideal artist, "a traditionalist with radical ambitions." They make a case for a larger project that stems from picking up on the work of earlier artists, exploring avenues that remain untapped. And, they do this without a lot of fanfare or theoretical flourish,

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

which brings to mind Cézanne's famous quote; "The grandiose grows tiresome after a while."