

Literary Still Life

Week 6:

Content Focus: Narrative

Technique Focus:

Any we've used this class

Content:

In a way, every assignment you've worked on this class is narrative, in that when you begin to use symbolism (through metaphor, irony, parody etc.) you are establishing a situation or tableau that you want the viewer to understand.

However, I would like you to take narrative a bit further in this last assignment and make it more personal. "A Day (or hour or minute) in the Life of...YOU".

To accomplish this, you need to do a couple of things:

- 1) suggest time or "activity"
- 2) include things from your routine, every-day life.

Look at the difference between the static, very traditional still life by Robert DeVoe (top) and the one by Janet Fish (center). In the Fish piece, she "narrates" a story of a knocked over candlestick, nibbled cupcakes, spilled milk and the cat jumping off the table (caught in the act of raiding the goodies). Thus the title of the piece –"SCAT". This is the kind of narrative I'm talking about.



"Still Life with Petunias", Robert C. DeVoe, watercolor 20" x 30",
Collection Owens-Corning Fiberglass.



"Scat", Janet Fish, oil on canvas, 1986, 58" x 85"



"Dog Days", Janet Fish, 1993, Oil on Canvas, 46" x 80"

In Fish's other piece shown at left, there is that same narrative quality suggested by activity. The objects (lemonade and watermelon, red, white and blue in the flowers and vase) suggest the hot (dog days) of summer, but through the still life, we see two dogs cavorting in the background, one laying in the shade, while another looks on from the side. We know these are still life paintings because most of the picture area is given to the still life objects, but the inclusion of "environment" and action makes them narrative as well.