painted places...

Andrea Blanar

And

Thelma Rosner

January 9 to February 13, 2000
Curator: Dawn White Beatty
going to andrea's...
rich textures
dark woods
soft sounds
layers of a life...

the objects of a traveler
placed lovingly
comfortably at home
in this spot
awaiting the touch
the gaze,
the artist's eyes that see
within
around
and back in time
each bit a memoir

sea weeds, seashells, murmurs
of oceans, rhythm of tides,
the stories hang in air
and wait
for her hands to form them
into shapes
or strokes of colour

they drift up stairs
on warm currents of air
and hover there
in that bird nest studio
and look at sky and light
and tops of trees

and then they settle
into the work
and become

The paintings of these two artists have many interesting points of intersection. Andrea Blanar is a regional artist whose works reflect her reverence for East Coast marshes and all places where water meets land. Thelma Rosner is a London artist whose large scale paintings are subtle juxtapositions of the things of place. Just as Blanar's lush landscapes transform before our eyes to become rich tableaus of still life, so do Rosner's luminous combinations of objects become dream landscapes for the viewer. This act of transformation is evident in the work of each artist and reinforced by the theatrical use of framing devices and structures that each employs, which are suggestive of scenes, acts and high drama. Their interpretations of and focus on iconic objects, and the importance of the object's placement or setting is theatrical and intriguing, and common to both bodies of work. Their individual, yet equally beautiful colour palettes and skilled handling of paint create visual effects much like the layers of sound of a symphony, rising and falling in harmonious movement in the works. The elements of theatre are all about us here.

Thelma Rosner identifies the theatre of life within the everyday by framing, isolating, juxtaposing and closely examining the objects of our private lives. She speaks through the discreet arrangement of a still life of the domestic essence as a staged event, a narrative spoken with objects, uses sensuous elements such as tapestries, laces and beautiful foods, known and beloved of women, to create dramas that shift still life to landscape and back again. The way that she builds a story with segmented canvases of seemingly disparate items or creates a domestic landscape of textiles and kitchen tools is witty and sly. She tangles and engages the viewer in dialogues around contentious issues of identity and gender by confronting us with familiar objects.
placed in compelling relationships. We are soothed and seduced by the sumptuous paint strokes and jewel-like colours of the luscious fruits and vegetables of her canvases, the stitches and fibres of loved textile patterns, and we linger there to savour and reflect on the ironic commentary that they hold.

Rosner’s engagement with the feminine object and her subtle reevaluation of it as an important storyteller in the narrative of life makes this work poignant and alive. Her ironic commentary about the ways we live, about how we categorize experience and gauge the importance of a life gives us pause. Her concern is with the quality of our existence as a culture, which is reflected in the objects that we choose as important icons, and our ways of instilling these icons and their associated dogmas into the fabric of our lives. She reminds us with subtle humour and dramatic presentation that all is not well.

In Andrea Blanar’s paintings and sculptural assemblage, we sense her reverence for the wetlands, salt marshes and creatures of the Bay of Fundy; her works are concerned with physical place and landscape. Hers is also a theatrical presentation of ornately framed paintings – the whimsical framing devices are often painted onto the canvas, or the landscape itself extends off the canvas and onto the frame or furniture framework of the painting. This gives the work a sense of transformation, from landscape to still life, as the layers of embellishment add another dimension to the work. Multiple perspectives within the landscapes play with our perceptions of the land and our own relationship to it. All at once we may be falling into the picture, or soaking our feet in the detailed foreground salt marsh, and at the same time observing the grand vista of the horizon or a birds-eye view of the entire scene. Blanar observes all facets of a scene and paints in the plants and creatures, the ebb and flow of tides and the traces of human activity that she senses there. Influences as diverse as European religious iconography, Maritime folk art traditions, ancient artifacts and traditional landscape painting inform the work and show evidence of the experiences of the traveler/artist who created them.

A recent interesting development in her body of work is the introduction of sculptural assemblage as an extension of the painted surface. This technique truly turns landscape toward still life by way of intensely personal ceramic sculptures that incorporate elements of both traditions. Blanar combines treasures found on beaches and city lots with molded, shaped, broken and
reworked clay fragments to produce small tableaux that contain the essence of her painted works. Sometimes she reproduces the paint strokes and embellishments in the swirls and sinuous curves that she makes with the clay. Alternatively, she paints the fired clay assemblages here and there with the same strokes contained in the panoramas of the canvases. She reworks, removing and adding elements until she arrives at the new thought. Together, these paintings and sculptures suggest a faith in nature and its strength to overcome all of our follies and attempts to destroy it, and a warning to us to pay attention and have respect for these sacred places.

In the works of both artists landscape and cultural icons are combined in ways that suggest narrative and memory, and provide rich insights into the ways that these women bring order to nature and life in their work. Additionally, in this exhibition both painters have produced works that are sculptural and three-dimensional. Blunan has extended her visual vocabulary to include sculpted works in clay that are small stage-like settings, and Rosner has created an installation of music stands and paintings that again reinforces the notion of the stage or performance. These new works, combined with the lush painting and scale of the painted works create a dramatic dialogue; the combination of nature and the artifact in the structures of both painters presents the viewer with an intense experience of bold work and spiritual presence.

Dawn White Beatty

going to Thelma’s…

through a door
and into a magic cache of treasures
of such domestic heaven
in Kate’s kitchen

no wonder we find them
on the canvases above

they float up stairs up, up
and land in paintings

lemons
fishes
and roasting pans
and such
causing their creator
much concern with placement

what is the meaning of this?
we follow
up, up, up
and find the artist
there with coffee and paris
and space to roam
clear light, clear thoughts
and room for big ideas

a tension here
constraint and freedom
played out in paint
this against that
objects become monumental landscape
the pattern of a brocade
an endless sea of grass
grand domestic theatre

smooth as silk
slippery as butter
sharp as a knife…
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COVER PHOTOS (top to bottom):
Andrea Blanar • Detail of ‘Lauds’, 1999
Andrea Blanar • Detail of ‘Clerestory’, 1999
Thelma Rosner • Detail of ‘Still Life with Oriental Carpet’, 1998-99
Thelma Rosner • Detail of ‘Still Life with Lace Tablecloth’, 1998-99
(Background) Thelma Rosner • Detail of ‘Still Life with Lace Tablecloth’, 1998-99

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Andrea Blanar Images: Cees Van Gemerden
Thelma Rosner Images: John Tamblyn

BURLINGTON ART CENTRE

1333 Lakeshore Road, Burlington, Ontario CANADA
Phone: (905) 632-7796 • Fax: (905) 632-0278
www.BurlingtonArtCentre.on.ca
info@BurlingtonArtCentre.on.ca

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