

Art in America

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Janet Fish at DC Moore

Janet Fish's recent oil-on-canvas still lifes testify to her regard for formal nuance and her unwavering ability to direct the viewer's attention through complex compositions. Fish's orchestration of light and shadow not only emphasizes the volumetric aspects of the objects portrayed but establishes season, time of day, a sense of occasion. She investigates degrees of transparency in the light-conducting and reflecting glass and ceramic vessels she selects and the liquids or objects they contain, establishing a variety of compositional problems, then resolving them.



Fish spreads a windowpane-pattern cloth across an unseen table in the 40-by-50-inch *Feathers* (2004). The horizontals and verticals of the pattern extend to an autumnal woodland just beyond a sill which serves as a horizon in the middle distance. The verticals and neutral colors with which she conveys the desiccated, distant woods are repeated in the bars and chevrons of a bouquet of wild turkey and pheasant feathers arranged in a patterned southwestern pot. Scattered on the cloth are pinecones and seashells, a sand dollar, a starfish, a sea urchin. The urchin and a small cone rest on the open page of a spiral-bound notebook that in itself seems freighted as a memento mori. A warmer light that throws shadows on the notebook and nearby objects derives from an unseen lamp, while the blue light elsewhere is a product of the wintry day outside.

Conversely, the light that brightens the 50-by-80-inch *Roses, Nectarines, Snow* (2004) seems to find its source in the panorama of a winter afternoon outside, beyond the windowpane, illuminating a collection of objects arranged on a snowy white cloth. Fish has selected four principal objects for their ability to gather and transmit light: a low, wide-mouthed cranberry glass vessel containing two shells and a lacy fan of dried underwater flora; a glass compote containing a few nectarines; a lustrous pressed-glass vase filled with pink and yellow roses; and an abalone shell with its rough exterior and pearlescent core. Each casts a shadow across the table.

Fish uses colored glass vessels to similar advantage as she explores the interplay of light and shadow on the 7-foot breadth of *Pinwheels/Cupcakes/Melon* (2004). She whirls highlights on a luminous sewing bowl of Thiebaud-like cupcakes and several striped foil pinwheels. To the right, a wire caddy holds a single striped glass and a bottle of orange soda, and just beyond is a Chinese checker game board. These and other objects tilt toward viewer and picture plane, gathered together like familiars at a festive party. - Edward Leffingwell