

Reflecting on Still Lives

Fran Beallor's compositions allow her to retreat from a chaotic world.

By Kristin D. Godsey

For New York City artist Fran Beallor, there's something to be said for order, serenity and subject matter that doesn't talk back. Still lifes provide all three, so much so that Beallor affirms: "Still life is meditation. My studio is a calm, quiet, reflective place. I love this retreat from the business of the world."

Beallor, whose mother is also a painter, grew up knee-deep in artists and art museums, and carved out an impressive education to live up to these surroundings. She attended the Pratt Institute in New York as well as the Art Students League, and considered traditional masters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer to be her "lifeblood as a child." While drawing is her first love, oils become her medium of choice for their sensuality, texture and connection with history.

Setting up a still life can take Beallor a week or longer. The composition is the most important step. "Once everything's in place and I start painting," she says, "I can just fly with it."

She uses thin washes to lay in her painting, which may or may not start with a charcoal sketch on the prepared canvas (it depends on the complexity of the scene). She'll usually put in the darkest darks first, then the lightest lights, then work toward the middle tones. Applying glaze after glaze—"sometimes up to 20 layers," she says—allows Beallor to build luminous color.

"I like to reward myself," Beallor adds, "so after I've blocked in the whole painting, I'll pick one small area and try to bring it to completion. My paintings take forever, so this gets me a little closer to instant gratification. I'll work around the painting this way."

The kimono in *Blue Glass With Orchids* (above) demonstrates another of Beallor's working methods, which is to "remix the color for practically every brushstroke. I don't mix up a whole lot of one color at once," she says. "I want each stroke to be slightly different. It's like fingerprints. As in life, nothing's really all one color."

Reflections hold particular fascination for Beallor, and she has fun with them. "You look at something shiny, and it looks shiny," she explains. "But look at it closely and there's so much happening. It's like a whole world in there." Scrutinize even the smallest reflections in her paintings and you'll be rewarded with a glimpse of that world—whether it's a tiny rendition of Beallor at her easel or a more prominent scene of her whole studio, complete with furnishings and the occasional onlooker.

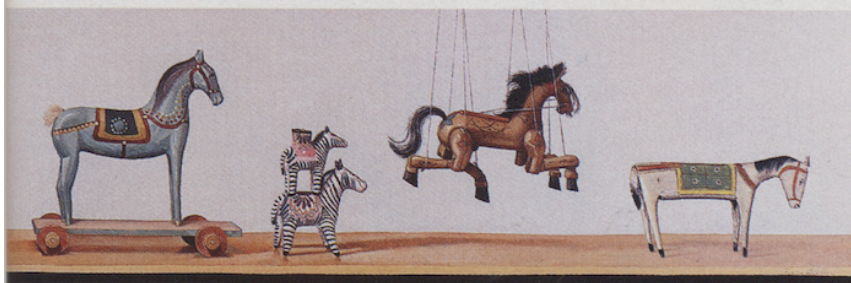
Beallor's most recent work has focused more on objects in motion, falling through the air or suspended, and the addition of figures and self-portraits. To see more of her paintings, visit www.franbeallor.com. ♦



Objectivity

Blue Glass With Orchids (above; oil, 28x22) was a 2001 Art Competition finalist. A Horse of a Different Color (below; oil, 16x48).

COMPETITION Spotlight



KRISTIN D. GODSEY is a senior editor for The Artist's Magazine.