



Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 13, 2012

MARTHA MAYER ERLEBACHER AND THE AMERICAN STILL LIFE



SANTA BARBARA, CA – Sullivan Goss is pleased to announce, *MARTHA MAYER ERLEBACHER* and *THE AMERICAN STILL LIFE*, the gallery's third solo show for the leading American Realist.

Martha Erlebacher's meticulous still life paintings reference a tradition that stretches back to Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia and even further into the Dutch still life tradition of the seventeenth century. Her quest to master the techniques of the past, however, is balanced by her desire to speak to recent developments in the way people look at and think about art. She is not interested in imitation, except as a subject that's ripe for her wry sense of humor.

Take, for example, the *Trompe, Trompe* quartet of paintings. There, we find four hyper-realistic renderings of bunches of grapes and olives hanging against the white wall of the artist's studio. Old pencil and sanguine lines criss-cross the space dividing up golden rectangles. Tack holes appear to puncture the canvas. The grapes seem tangible and three dimensional, popping off of the canvas. They are classic *trompe l'oeil* (fool the eye) paintings in the tradition of William Harnett and Edwin Deakin, but these paintings have a twist. Some of the grapes depicted are real grapes; others are made of glass and wood. The double "*trompe*" relates to the layers of illusion. By creating a *trompe l'oeil* painting of *trompe l'oeil* objects, the artist offers a clever commentary on a central paradox of Realist painting: how much artifice, illusion, and craft is necessary to capture truth and reality.

Her fastidiously composed tabletop arrangements of fruits and vegetables tell a similar story. On the one hand, these paintings occupy an honored place in our shared memory of home and of American still life painting. People in search of great craft or a feeling of happy domesticity will be amply rewarded. Foodies will rejoice in the delectable images of cherries, apples, citrus, melons, tomatoes, and bell peppers. On the other hand, there is something quite contrived about these. Perfectly stacked and artfully cut fruit are painted just as perfectly and artfully. These paintings reference the "home" we prepare for special guests – the "home" we see in high-end interior design magazines. The tableaux are incredibly beautiful, but are they "real?"

Indeed, what does it mean to be a Realist painter in this conceptual era of ours? Also, how can an artist who is passionate about the craft and history of her art form reconcile that devotion with the intellectual vagaries and lax execution that dominate today's contemporary art world? Martha's new paintings suggest her answer.

Martha Mayer Erlebacher lives just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She received an MFA from Pratt Institute in New York. She has had an extensive teaching career for the past four decades at some of the finest art schools in Philadelphia and New York. In addition to being included in many prestigious private collections, her work is also featured in over a dozen national museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, among others.

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