

“When I began exploring the Islands of Maine, I was captivated by the visual impact of objects, textures and colors from the natural surroundings juxtaposed with simple, and simply beautiful functional objects. Everywhere I looked I saw an off-handed style of arranging objects into unintentional still lives that spoke volumes about life on the islands of Maine...” For the past twenty years Stephanie Bartron-Miscione has held fast to these words.

Bartron-Miscione doesn't just look at the world of coastal Maine, she sees right into its DNA. The intimate still lives she sets up in her farmhouse studio on Deer Isle are like characters in a play. These crustaceans and commonplace forms speak to one another; jostle each other for space, and toy with neighboring colors. Her props are set in simple arrangements that entice more than the eye and the palette. In this quiet environment of familiar objects we are reminded of the work of Giorgio Morandi, an earlier 20th century artist. He repeated the ordinary and the available and observed his world with an objective eye.

Ms. Bartron-Miscione's practice is one of meticulously describing still life forms from observation, in doing so she gives them a life and a soul. The light that defines them, separates and envelops them, is continually being examined and not left to the instantaneous click of a shutter. As the light changes and gets recorded, it further highlights her conversation with each object. Every mark and stroke brings forward into existence an element of the observed lobster, crab or gourd. These forms physically occupy her space and her world. They are there when she enters the studio and when she leaves. They are not seen at a sixtieth of a second as in a photograph but slowly change and develop and evolve over a period of time. There is no rush to get the image out. The gestation period can last for months or a year. It is not the high level of realism that pulls us into these paintings' orbit but the sense of meditation we encounter. This quiet contemplation of the ordinary is quite anathema to our popular culture.

Methodically researched and singularly observed, the forms get visually dissected by this artist's eye. The coastal creatures and common objects are scrutinized under a magnifying glass in the long tradition of botanical and scientific illustration. Like a surgeon slowly finding a path to a hidden truth or revelation, Ms. Bartron-Miscione uncovers the tangible and rich history of her forms while exposing their simplicity. Her exacting examination of each subject and the space it occupies define her reverence for these forms. In this respect her process of working is reminiscent of the wildlife artist John James Audubon.

The coast of Maine is undeniably rich with imagery. It has fueled artists for generations such as Winslow Homer, John Marin, Neil Welliver and John Walker. These artists have looked at the larger, natural world where sea meets sky and the forces of nature rack the coastal land. Stephanie Bartron-Miscione however

is looking at the intimate world. She does not have her telescope set on the dramatic; she is taking her cues from the domestic and the familiar. In this microenvironment we take in her simple juxtapositions of these everyday objects and infer a commentary on life on this island. This celebrated landscape is now made personal by thoughtful and beautifully visualized choices.

The genre of still life painting has been popular with artists since the wall paintings and floor mosaics of Pompeii. This rich tradition alludes to the social issues of seduction, memento mori, consumption, and opulence. In this way Bartron-Miscione's paintings are no different. We linger over her *Five-Pound Lobster*, marvel at the sweetness and richness of cherries and acknowledge a passage of time in the autumnal painting *Still Life With Gourds*. We are additionally moved to think about generations of fishermen and romantic notions of the sea. In a larger social context we consider the burden we put on the environment when objects of desire are highlighted.

Is Stephanie Bartron-Miscione a romantic, a naturalist or simply a recorder of daily life? There is no doubt of her love for her subject and her environment. There is also no denying her obsession with the labor of mark-making and observation. Is it her passage of time we experience as we move from object to object or our own? Are these simple objects the subject or is there a greater subtext? What ultimately makes Ms. Bartron-Miscione's still life paintings so compelling is her luscious description of simple things so complex in meaning.

Stephanie Bartron-Miscione: <http://www.sbartron-miscione.com>

© Janis Goodman
2009