

For Janet Fish, there is no such thing as a still life. There is an energy, a vibrancy, a life situation where things are moving and being. Everything is alive. For her, it is as much painting life as anything else. She says: "Still life always seem to me the wrong words. The words "still" and "nature morte" has always been the wrong phrase too, because it's not dead. Things aren't dead. The light would be through everything and energy through everything."

Janet Isobel Fish was born May 18, 1938. She came from a family of artists: mother and uncle were sculptors, her sister a photographer, and her grandfather, Clark Voorhees, formed part of the Lyme Circle of American Impressionists. She was raised in Bermuda, later studied at Smith College in Massachusetts (B.A., 1960), the Skowhegan School in Maine, and obtained her B.F.A. and later her M.A. at Yale in 1963, where Josef Albers's course "The Interaction of Color" was a formative influence.

Abstract Expressionism, arising from the 1950s, was all the rage at art schools during her Yale years. Yet for Fish, "Abstract Expressionism didn't mean anything to me. It was a set of rules." She felt totally disconnected from it. Instead, her desire was towards the "physical presence of objects." She wanted to get past the clichés and try to discover what she saw when looking at something. She doesn't deny that she was influenced by Abstract Expressionism's active qualities and its use of the entire canvas. Yet, she was drawn more to the palpable relationships between objects within the real world. It was the personal connection between herself with what she was doing that was important. What went on around her was only incidental to her deep interest in painting. She held a strong belief in painting and that one could make great art. This attitude and wanting to explore things more directly, held more importance than anything anyone else might say to her about her work.

Her concentration on still life composition started in the 1960s, when Pop art prevailed in the art world. Like the work of many Pop artists, her early work contained similarities to advertising where the attractiveness of the object was depicted, where primary objects were monumentalized, and where the visual field was reduced. During this time, her interest included plastic wrapping of everyday consumer items, which allowed for the play of light and shadow reflected on and through the transparent plastic. She then further explored a different and equally remarkable representation of lighting effects, specifically the reflective quality of light as it plays on the surface of colorful glass bowls. "I don't screen for corniness" ... "I love the translucency of opalescent glass and shrink-wrapped plastic alike," she declares. As in "June", a mature work, as well as her later works, she started to bring flowers into her compositions, not only displaying a contrasting texture at play against her carefully-chosen objects, but an ephemeral reminder of energy and life. Some observers regard her color choices as high-key and exaggerated, yet considering her childhood memories of Bermuda, where vibrancy of off-beat color is customary, this comes as little surprise. Her chosen medium in her work consists mainly of oils, in addition to pastel, watercolors, and screenprints.

Today, Janet Fish, with studios in Soho as well as Middletown Springs, Vermont, thinks of herself as a "painterly realist," primarily interested in light, atmosphere, motion and lush, saturated color. Her art can be thought of as a blend of abstract art and realism. During her early searches for artistic identity coupled with an ambivalence towards Abstract Expressionism, she was influenced by the realism art of Alex Katz and followed his suggestion of exploring nature in her work. She still believes still life to be the most innovative genre available to painters, since it allows for the greatest range between realism and abstraction and a means to further expand visual perception. She invites the viewer into her world, to see and experience what she sees. Furthermore, she challenges us to look at common, everyday objects in a new way. Her paintings both record the wondrous discoveries of her eyes, and challenge us to consider the poetic potential of the things of this world.

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