

SHELLEY JORDON



VIEWPOINTS 11

Cover: *Oriental Poppies*, 2000, oil on canvas, 48 x 70 in. (122 x 178 cm)
Back Cover: *Green Plums and Lilies*, 2000, 48 x 48 in. (122 x 122 cm)

Exhibition dates: September 15 through November 5, 2000

Viewpoints is a continuing series of exhibitions devoted to the work of contemporary artists who are redefining the concepts of representation and content in modern painting.

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Editor: Richard V. West
Design: Charla Reid
Printing: Hemlock Printers, Inc.
Copyeditor: Carole Levinthal

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SHELLEY JORDON
REVEALING BEAUTY

Essay by
Elizabeth McGowan

FRYE ART MUSEUM

2000



PLATE I

Hot Chili Oil, 1995, 48 x 48 in. (122 x 122 cm)

REVEALING OBJECTS: DEFINING BEAUTY

In a world where the pace of life has increased exponentially and immediate gratification displaced the savoring of the moment, so much of art today seems too fast, too accessible, the equivalent of one-liners in advertising. In contrast, Shelley Jordon's rich, layered still-life paintings reward careful viewing. Jordon uses a disciplined, time-consuming oil-on-canvas technique to recreate a traditional genre and make it new. A still-life painting is usually small in scale and scope, a careful, quiet assemblage of objects in an enclosed domestic environment. In her paintings, Jordon breaks open that box. She redefines and expands the concept of still life. Like many contemporary women writers, filmmakers, and musicians, Jordon re-examines the domestic sphere. By revealing the objects and foods of daily life on a grand scale, Jordon recasts and widens the characteristic space of female action as a realm of powerful potential.

Still life has been characterized as the humblest of genres, but Jordon's paintings are heroic in scale. Although the everyday objects and foods are the familiar, intimate stuff of still life, the artist—while painting from life—depicts her subject matter as if magnified. Under this lens, the familiarity of cloth, vases, fruit and flowers is intensified. By showing each object literally larger than life, Jordon exposes its



PLATE II

Asiatic Lilies and Avocadoes, 1999, 48 x 60 in. (122 x 152 cm)

strength and inner beauty. In this dilation, the mundane becomes monumental in both form and concept. Relationships between objects on this scale take on a strong metaphorical, if not narrative, significance. The passage across vases, foods and cloth is like an urban skyline.

Jordon's paintings are forceful not only in scale but in technique. The actual dimensions of the canvas present a technical challenge and attest to the artist's physical stature and strength. Brushstrokes are bold and gestural. The surface of the painting is strong and lush in texture and color. The larger canvases seem to wrap around or embrace the viewer like a huge Cinemascope screen. Such closeness is intense, experiential: we smell the scent of open flowers, taste the orange flesh of a cut melon, touch the matte baskets and glassy vases, rough melon skin and waxy lemons. Light scatters and reflects off glazed or metallic surfaces, animating the scene. Taste, smell, touch, sight: the only missing sense is the aural. If one could hear a painting, Jordon's work would have the powerful throaty sound of a jazz vocalist.

Unlike the work of most still-life painters, Jordon's assemblages aren't locked into a closed studio space, but are set before a window opening on the outside world, revealing an urban or natural landscape.



PLATE III

Mineola Tangelos, 1999, 60 x 144 in. (152 x 366 cm)

The layering of environments creates nuanced connections, as well as tension, between the domestic interior and the exterior realm usually associated with male action. Traditional hierarchies are thrown into question by the size and balance of those household objects, culled from daily life, which have been made central and monumental



against this backdrop. The artist's cropping of the images intensifies our focus on the still life, bringing the viewer into the world of the painting, yet further diffusing the scene outside the studio window. Thus, in *Sweet Delicata* (FIGURE 1) the central vase of flowers dominates the view of distant river barges. Or in *Mineola Tangelos* (PLATE III), a bunch of curving bananas and vases of Australian water lilies and sunflowers form strong focal points, while in the

background the steel girders of the Fremont Bridge become a delicate, almost calligraphic, arch. At times, a second interior world is seen, distorted and reflected by glass and glazed surfaces within the still life. Not only is the still life reflected but, at times, so is the room that stretches back to include the viewer's psychological space and the viewpoint of the painter. Within the supposedly finite parameters of still-life painting, Jordon creates a sense of multiple spaces and

FIGURE 1

Sweet Delicata,
1997, 48 x 60 in.
(122 x 152 cm)



PLATE IV

Pepino Melons, 1999, 48 x 48 in. (122 x 122 cm)



PLATE V

Sweet Delicata and Australian Orchids, 2000, 48 x 70 in. (122 x 178 cm)



PLATE VI

Black-Eyed Susan and Nectarines, 1999, 48 x 60 in. (122 x 152 cm)

multiple meanings, grounded in the traditional arrangement of domestic foods, flowers and props, yet opening up beyond these central elements like filaments extending out from and beyond a central web.

Jordon's paintings evoke not only a sense of place but also time. Because the painter works in natural light, the scenes through the window engage with the interior still life to heighten our awareness of time and season. Again in *Mineola Tangelos*, blank house facades against the skimmed blue-gray light of a Northwestern winter sky provides a cool foil to the complex, powerfully vibrant scene inside. Likewise, in *Black-eyed Susans and Nectarines* (PLATE VI) the fruits and flowers of late summer seen against a river landscape and golden sky creates an aching sense of summer's final days, imminent change, passing time. Even when a landscape is omitted, the specific sense of season can be present in a reflective surface. In *Pepino Melons* (PLATE IV) the pictorial frame is cropped to show only the table top with the still life of fruit and objects. But reflected in that polished table we see the lush foliage of summer trees.

Jordon combines other aspects of the still life with the background scenes of barges, factories, buildings, and bridges to anchor the paintings in the present day. These pictures are unmistakably contemporary.



PLATE VII

Baby Pears and Sunflowers, 1997, 48 x 48 in. (122 x 122 cm)

Jordon takes a certain, almost perverse, delight in the beauty of ordinary market or garden flowers and grocery store fruits. Her pictures offer a social history of contemporary supermarketting, but though the bananas may bear their import label, this fact is presented wholly without irony. The painter instructs us to look at what exists today in a new light. Lacking is the negative social critique which became normal for so much art at the end of the twentieth century. The inclusion of the manmade, the store-bought, creates an awareness, if not celebration, of "low art," those objects which are produced commercially. A seventeenth-century Dutch still life painter might depict the luxurious food and vessels the aristocrat aspired to have. Jordon, however, reveals the beauty in the objects we already own: a brassy colored tin can can be as gorgeous as the Dutch painter's golden chalice, or the reflection and refraction of light and image through a plastic bottle of plain water as valid as that observed through a delicate blown glass goblet. There is an essential honesty in the plain foods and objects of daily life. Here, at the start of the new millennium, Shelley Jordon asks us to regard anew the domestic realm of still life, and in doing so, to reconsider our definition of beauty. ■



PLATE VIII

Roman Vista with Cantaloupe, 1994, 52 x 52 in. (132 x 132 cm)

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

SHELLEY JORDON (B. 1954)

EDUCATION

- 1986 M.F.A., Brooklyn College of the City
University of New York
- 1976 B.F.A., School of Visual Arts, New York City,
Regents Scholarship
- 1969-1972 High School of Art and Design,
New York City

TEACHING

- 1992-Present Associate Professor of Art, Oregon
State University, Corvallis, Oregon
- 1986-1992 Assistant Professor of Art, Oregon
State University, Corvallis, Oregon

AWARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- 1997-1998 Oregon Arts Commission Individual
Artist Fellowship Award in Painting
- 1994 American Academy in Rome, Visiting Artist,
Rome, Italy
- 1989 Fulbright-Hays Group Travel Research Grant
to Yemen and Tunisia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 *Revealing Beauty*, Frye Art Museum, Seattle,
Washington
- 1999 *Reflections on Light*, Holter Museum of Art,
Helena Montana
Recent Paintings, Linda Hodges Gallery,
Seattle, Washington (also 1996)
- 1995 *The Rome Paintings*, West Gallery, Oregon
State University, Corvallis, Oregon
- 1992 Maryhill Museum, Goldendale, Washington

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 *Second Annual Realism Invitational*, Jenkins
Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1997 *Oregon Biennial*, Portland Art Museum,
Portland, Oregon; Schneider Museum of Art,
Ashland, Oregon; University of Oregon,
Eugene, Oregon; and Hallie Ford Museum of
Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon
- True Art: Northwest Biennial*, Tacoma Art
Museum, Tacoma, Washington
- Pacific Northwest Annual*, Bellevue Art Museum,
Bellevue, Washington

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Alpenrose Corporation, Portland, Oregon
- Bennett & Company, Newburyport, Massachusetts
- City of Portland, Visual Chronicle Collection,
Portland, Oregon
- Edison Elementary School, Tacoma, Washington
- Enro Corporation, New York City
- Grayco Corporation, Portland, Oregon
- Nordstrom's Inc., Seattle, Washington
- University of Washington Hospital, Seattle, Washington

Elizabeth McGowan is a Classical archaeologist and art historian. She received her B.A. from Princeton University and her Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. She is currently an associate professor in the Department of Art, Williams College.



PLATE IX

Artichokes and Lemons, 2000, 60 x 144 in. (152 x 366 cm)

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Height precedes width. Dimensions are given in inches and (centimeters).
Medium is oil on canvas. Loans are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

1. *Espresso Pot and Lemons*, 1994, 52 x 52 (132 x 132). Collection of Judy and Peter List
2. *Ferrarelle and Red Gerber Daisies*, 1994, 52 x 52 (132 x 132)
3. *Roman Vista with Cantaloupe*, 1994, 52 x 52 (132 x 132). Collection of Judy and Bill Herzberg
4. *Two Red Barges with Sunflowers*, 1994, 48 x 48 (122 x 122)
5. *Via Aurelia and Rosseti*, 1994, 50 x 50 (127 x 127). Collection of Cathleen Buckon and David Rabin
6. *Hood River Peaches*, 1995, 48 x 48 (122 x 122)
7. *Hot Chili Oil*, 1995, 48 x 48 (122 x 122)
8. *Lisianthus and Macintosh Apples*, 1995, 48 x 48 (122 x 122). Collection of Rhonda Schwartz and Steven Slovic
9. *Venetian Glass*, 1995, 32 x 32 (81 x 81)
10. *Baby Pears and Sunflowers*, 1997, 48 x 48 (122 x 122)
11. *Sweet Delicata*, 1997, 48 x 60 (122 x 152). The Valley Library, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon
12. *Sweet Gypsy Peppers*, 1997, 48 x 48 (122 x 122). Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco
13. *Godetia and Nectarines*, 1998, 30 x 30 (76 x 76)
14. *Nine Studies*, 1998, 12 x 12 (31 x 31) (each)
15. *Asiatic Lilies and Avocadoes*, 1999, 48 x 60 (122 x 152). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
16. *Bananas, Pears, and Anthirium*, 1999, 48 x 48 (122 x 122). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
17. *Black-Eyed Susan and Nectarines*, 1999, 48 x 60 (122 x 152)
18. *Garden Peonies*, 1999, 32 x 32 (81 x 81). Collection of Stan and Michelle Rosen
19. *Mineola Tangelos*, 1999, 60 x 144 (152 x 366). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
20. *Pepino Melons*, 1999, 48 x 48 (122 x 122). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
21. *Red Peppers and Parrot Tulips*, 1999, 60 x 48 (152 x 122). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
22. *Watermelon and Yellow Sky*, 1999, 48 x 60 (122 x 152). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
23. *Artichokes and Lemons*, 2000, 60 x 144 (152 x 366)
24. *Green Plums and Lilies*, 2000, 48 x 48 (122 x 122). Collection of Denis and Margaret Brown
25. *Oriental Poppies*, 2000, 48 x 70 (122 x 178). Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco
26. *Sweet Delicata and Australian Orchids*, 2000, 48 x 70 (122 x 178). Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle



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PRINTED IN CANADA