

December 01, 2002 Issue

Still Life's: Alive And Well

Here come the Holidays! Well, Thanksgiving has actually come and gone, that would be the kick-off of the season. The rest of this year will be a whirlwind of shopping, cooking, greeting friends, sending cards, decorating the house and yard, and planning parties. At least, that is how it should be. These days, for Ed and I, things have begun to mellow. Our preparations, if not sparse, are at best, somewhat toned down. When our boys were young, the season revolved around them. When they went to college, and to the Navy, we waited anxiously for them to arrive "safely" home for the holidays. All too soon, our sons chose brides, and established their own traditions, sharing the time with the new families. As the grandchildren arrived, the precious days were more important than ever to our children and their spouses to carefully nourish the season of joy and thanksgiving in their own homes, as we once did. To this end, my husband and I assumed the role of special guests. And this suits me just fine. I do, so much, enjoy the pleasures of watching the grandchildren, wide-eyed with wonder, eagerly await the magic of Christmas. I have earned the privilege of being the matron of the family, not expected to slave for hours in the kitchen, yet amazingly produce from the bottom of the large brown bag, a tasty, unusual, surprise "goody" from an old family recipe book (Better Homes And Gardens Recipe Book, circa 1964). It is a treat to pay undivided attention to Molly, now 11, as she reads from her latest book. Grandpa spends time with Zach, 7, the computer guy, who is a fast learner, and willing to share with him; and Aaron, 2, who falls asleep on his big strong shoulder. Megan, our precocious 5 year old, is developing her artistic talent, and I sit with her at the table creating crafts and unique paintings. Then, when it is time to clear the dinner dishes, and wash up, I take no offense in being gently urged to "let me do it, Mom, you just relax and play with the kids." No argument there! Well, come on Holidays!

Next Issue: Americana: Our Heritage

There are some who will argue that still life paintings are boring and mundane; that there are more exciting subjects to tempt the artist, that still life paintings have gone the way of the dodo bird. I, for one, delight in the challenge of creating a composition of inanimate objects, sometimes fruit and vegetables or flowers, to delight the eye of the beholder. I enjoy putting together unusual combinations in unique configurations to press the limits of the conventional. Yes, I have painted in watercolor, gouache and pastel, some interesting pieces, but the best are still forming in my head. I want to do a series of glass fishing floats. I have some excellent research material of dried autumn leaves balanced on smooth river rocks.

"I want to do a series of glass fishing floats"

Last year I was honored to spend time at the garden of a delightful Olympia area couple, who have set up their home and yard with enchanting still life "props". Nestled in one corner of the garden is a small shed draped with old logging implements. Around a corner are unique and charming birdhouses in twos and threes, or swaying all alone in a most picturesque old fruit tree. Snuggled amidst verdant blooms I spied a rusting mailbox stuffed with twigs from a previously occupied bird nest. Indoors, the talent of this couple was evidenced in the display of a violin and blooms in a tiny cubby hole under the stairs; a pot-bellied stove bedecked in twining ivy; a lovely hand blown glass candy dish smothered in dried pale-blue hydrangea heads; and from room to room, treasures to delight an artist's soul.

A life-long friend and fellow artist, Jean Barge, also lives in a still life wonderland. She resides on a ranch near Olympia. Over the years,

she has collected and displayed in her yard, the trappings of ranch and farm life. There are milk cans and watering buckets, chains and cowbells, a rusty wood burning stove, and a children's old tractor, that looks rather like it is longing for the child to return and take it for a spin. She has placed in shaded nooks; wagon wheels and water fountains. On a small ledge there is a Tiffany style lampshade, inverted and planted with succulents. I am sure that any time I wish, I could plan a get-together with her, and we would paint plein air until the cows come home. (At which time she would have to quit to do the milking!)

"we would paint plein air until the cows come home"

Now, let me wax eloquent concerning flowers and fruit. I have a lovely flower garden which each season provides me with a bounty of beautiful blooms. Over time, I have collected some quite nice vases in which to display them. My artistic eye enables me to creatively arrange bouquets, sometimes by color, sometimes by size and/or pairing of dissimilar shapes. Always I enjoy the challenge. Then I will sketch, photograph, or outright paint them on the spot. The first still life floral was in watercolor. I had been painting flowers for a while in 8" X 10" and 5" X 7" sizes to print as limited editions. When a "white-on-white" bouquet caught my eye, I knew I had to paint it. Since then, I have acquired the skill of painting with pastels and gouache, which permits me a greater freedom of choice in subject matter. As time went on, I set up fruit or vegetable still life compositions and painted or researched them (as time would permit). Boring? Mundane? Never. The artist must paint what inspires her.

Carol Thompson

Featured Artwork

Hydrangeas



"While participating in an outdoor art show one summer, I was painting en-plein-air, when a friend brought me a gift of flowers. I had no vase, but plopped them into a soda can and 'voila', a still life of 'hydrangeas'!."

Anthurium



"'Anthurium' comes in a variety of colors and sizes. It's glossy leaves are a perfect foil for the long shaft that bears tiny flowers. The plant is brilliant and long lasting in bouquets. What an exotic flower!"

Garden Harvest



"The 'garden harvest' is set out waiting to be taken in and prepared for the table. With rich colors of gold and green, accented by shiny red and plum, this is a pleasing display for the senses."