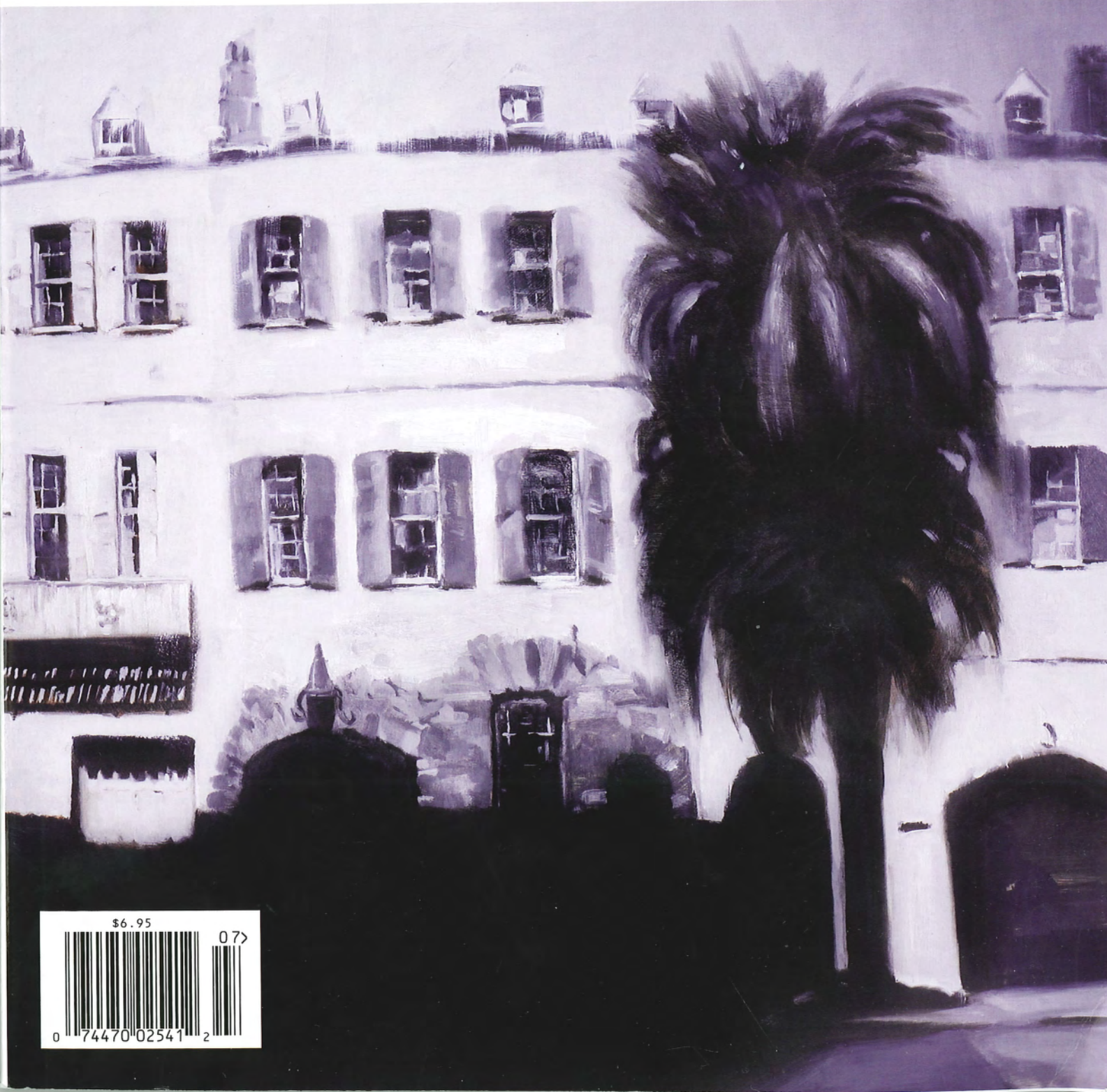


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Anything But Still

Katherine Ann Hartley's richly suggestive still life paintings hover in time but are grounded in place.

By Lauren P. Della Monica



Winter Bouquet, oil on panel, 18 x 26"

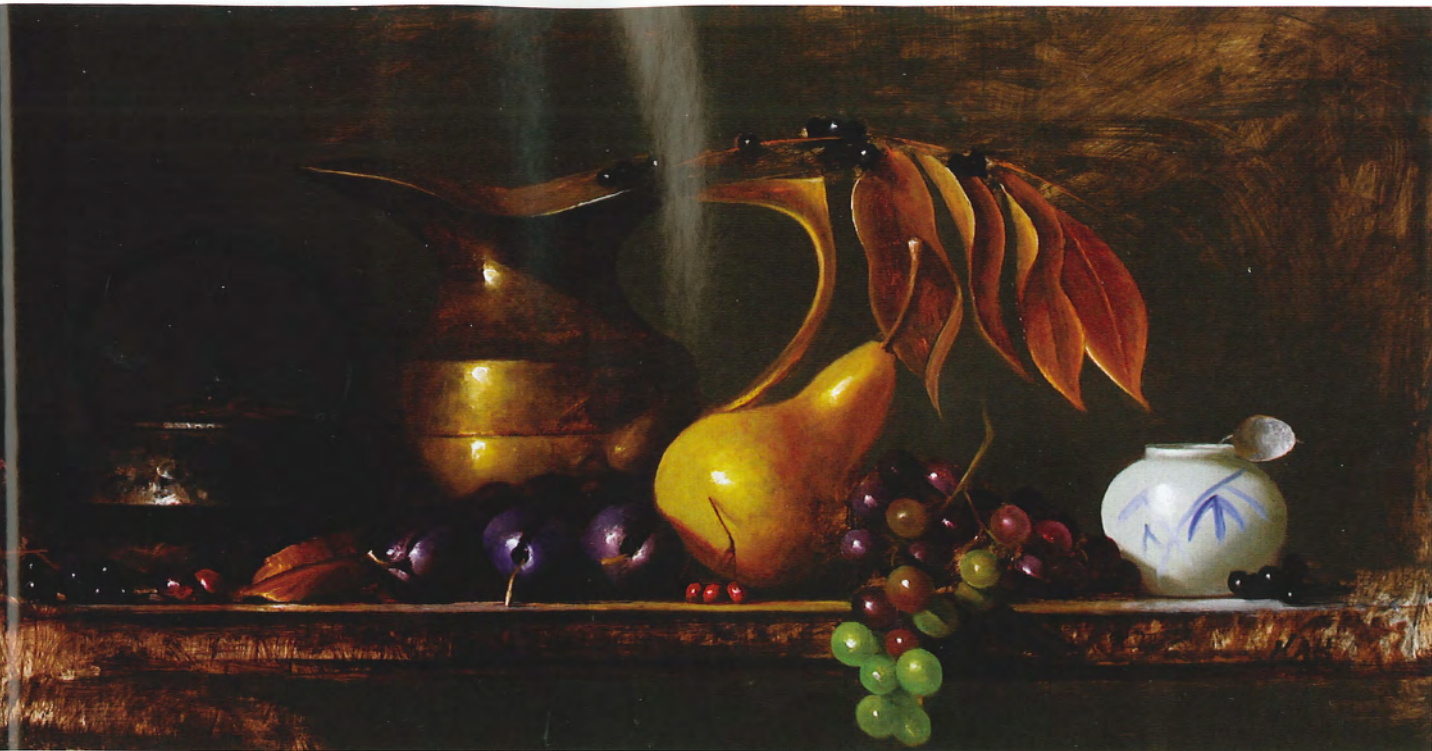
Still life often suggests an instant in time, a locale or a mood. Katherine Ann Hartley's still lifes do this and more. Working in the 16th-century European tradition of still life painting, Hartley imbues her contemporary still lifes with a timeless quality. In addition to universal beauty, Hartley's paintings bear witness to the

artist's personal collections and her home on Cape Cod.

Hartley's still lifes are carefully crafted arrangements of fruit, flowers and vessels against amorphous backgrounds painted with a balance of precision and abstraction. The artist draws from her collection of antiques as well as seasonal flowers and produce gathered

on local outings to create complicated and pleasing juxtapositions of objects.

"I work from the things around me. I grew up in old houses with old things around me. These places were often dusty and filled with character and felt approachable to me," says Hartley. "I still see images of old jars with light going through them. Painting them is



Chinese Teapot with Plums and Pear, oil on panel, 12 x 24"



Bosc Pear with Lantern, oil on panel, 20 x 22"

a way for me to try to make sense of that."

Working in her intimate studio in an old family home in Orleans, Massachusetts, Hartley sets each scene by carefully arranging her objects before a north facing window. The northern light in her studio (which the artist controls with a large piece of cardboard used as a shade) creates a dramatic still life setting.

Hartley describes her artistic inspiration and arrangement of objects as "fairly random."

"Sometimes I have no idea what I will paint next, and then something just hits me," she says. "Something has to be eye-catching, and everything else revolves around that. I once found a leaf, and I painted it for three years."

Hartley, who has spent most of her life on Cape Cod, studied painting under the tutelage of John Court in the Azores off Portugal, Steve Missal in Scottsdale, Arizona, and later David Leffel at the Art Students League of New York. Finding success as a full-time artist, Hartley returned home to take inspiration from her environment.

Inspired by the landscapes around her, Hartley approaches things differently than her landscape watercolorist mother. Hartley



Appalachian Jug with Sekel Pears and Concords, oil on panel, 16 x 30"

brings the outdoors into her studio through her selection of local subjects for her still life paintings.

Hartley explains her choice to paint still lifes: "Landscapes here on the Cape are too beautiful even to attempt to paint. They are so broad and vast that they are difficult to approach. I remember once walking on a Truro beach and finding it painfully beautiful, and I just couldn't figure out how to express it. In a way, landscapes are captured in my paintings without my having to go outside and do it."

In *Winter Bouquet*, a seasonal

representation of a Massachusetts coastal landscape, the objects echo the place of its creation; a worn conch shell found on a local beach centers the work beside a piece of colonial American pewter. The glass bottles, with their time-worn surfaces, echo the colors of the nearby sea.

"Almost every painting has something from nature. I am inspired by the wildness of the country on the Cape, the undergrowth, the flowers and blossoms, the berries."

The antique objects reflect the artist's desire to paint timeless scenes, ageless and impossible to define. Simultaneously, Hartley

creates a counterpoint to this perpetual notion of time by capturing the natural items, like berries and sheaves of leaves, at the zenith of their beauty, creating an exciting intellectual tension in the works.

Hartley's still lifes seem haphazard at first glance, with fruit and flowers scattered about the surface of a table or shelf, but the artist's deliberate use of classic compositional techniques creates stable scenes that are both pleasing to the eye and timeless. In *Appalachian Jug with Sekel Pears and Concords*, Hartley paints an autumnal still life of fruit and dried branches accented by golden and rusty tones



Bosc Pear with Silver, oil on panel, 12 x 24"



Artist Katherine Ann Hartley.

against a dark, loose, painterly background.

"I find it incredibly satisfying to paint, to bring order to the disorder," Hartley attests.

Hartley works on one painting at a time until completion, and of late her backgrounds, often a large portion of the compositions themselves, have tended toward the abstract or suggestive. This painterly approach, with broken up, loosely painted backgrounds, is intentional.

In *Bosc Pear with Lantern*, a moody, dark still life, the background is muddled with scratchy abstraction to suggest night, full of shadow and darkness. In other paintings, some

of her backgrounds remain tidy and clean.

"The hardest thing is knowing where to stop and leave the painting unfinished. I am trying not to over-paint things," she says.

For Hartley, light itself provides an environment in which her still life objects exist, with little imposed physical environment other than the occasional tabletop or shelf. The objects themselves dance with deep, rich color.

Katherine Ann Hartley is represented by Kiley Court Gallery, Provincetown, MA; Hearle Gallery, Chatham, MA; Plympton Collection, Plympton, MA; Churchill Gallery,

Newburyport, MA, and other galleries around the country. ●

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