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WILLIAMS, LAURA KEENE. Still Life Studies of Composition, Light,
Contrast, and Space. (1974)
Directed by: Andrew Martin. Pp. 3.

The thesis consists of eleven paintings and one drawing.

This thesis was exhibited in the Weatherspoon Art Gallery
of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from May 6 through
May 12, 1974.

A 35 mm color transparency of each work is on file at the
Walter C. Jackson Library of the University of North Carolina at
Greensboro.

STILL LIFE STUDIES OF COMPOSITION,
LIGHT, CONTRAST, AND
SPACE

by

Laura K. Williams

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1974

Approved by

Andrew Martin
Thesis Adviser

This thesis has been approved by the following committee
of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North
Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis
Adviser

Andrew Martin

Oral Examination
Committee Members

R. C. [unclear]

Walter Barker

P. G. [unclear]

Andrew Martin

April 16, 1974
Date of Examination by Committee

CATALOGUE

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Onion and Pitcher, Study II | Oil on canvas |
| 2. Onion and Pitcher, Study III | Oil on canvas |
| 3. Cup and Drape, Study I | Oil on canvas |
| 4. Cup and Drape, Study III | Oil on canvas |
| 5. Onion and Pepper, Study I | Oil on canvas |
| 6. Onion and Pepper, Study II | Oil on canvas |
| 7. Onion and Pepper, Study III | Oil on canvas |
| 8. Bottle and Shell, Study I | Oil on canvas |
| 9. Bottle and Shell, Study II | Oil on canvas |
| 10. Bottle and Shell, Drawing | Pencil on paper |
| 11. Bottle and Shell, Study III | Oil on canvas |
| 12. Bottle and Shell, Study IV | Oil on canvas |

All of the above works measure 10 x 12 inches.

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My thesis show consists of twelve studies of four still lifes. The eleven paintings are oil on canvas, and the drawing is pencil on paper. Still life provides me with the most effective situation for dealing with my interests and concerns regarding composition, light, contrast, and space. For example, by virtue of my choosing to paint two objects in conjunction with two planes in every situation, the compositional problem becomes one of polarity. Seen chronologically, my work is a progression of polar compositions of increasing difficulty, which necessitate more and more complex solutions. It is less of a challenge for me to paint two objects and one plane, or to paint two planes and three or more objects. Therefore, I choose to eliminate these alternatives.

I set up my still life situations in a natural light for both the situation and my palette. Varying the light in the paintings rather than in the studio allows me more control over the slight color and value modulations that become significant with a limited palette. Because of this, I can manipulate the warm and cool tones in light, and still use that light to both build the object as a form and provide a range for contrast between the surfaces of the planes and objects. I am looking for the light that creates the strongest form and highest surface contrast simultaneously.

I am more fascinated by differences, however slight, than by similarities. This factor is as operative in how I select objects as in how I paint them. There are, however, limits to the number and intensity

of contrasts that can be made in any one canvas while maintaining the unity of the painting. I am trying to find the point of balance between a maximum number of contrasts and the highest intensity of those contrasts. I am concerned with the contrast of object to plane or form to line, as well as with warm to cool tones, reflective to absorptive surfaces, and organic to man-made objects. I generally like a hue or value contrast, but rarely use both in the same painting. I also like contrasts in the textures of objects and planes: hard to soft, slick to rough; as well as in the quality of line: fast to slow, organic to geometric. The possibilities for modulation of contrasts, even within these limits, are infinite.

Spatially, I deal with a three-dimensional illusion that opposes the picture plane. I am concerned with the quality of the space rather than with that of the illusion. My space is not the crystal clear void of the trompe-l'oeil still life painter, but is instead a charged atmosphere that has weight and presence of its own. I paint atmospheric space as defined by the objects and planes. One of the reasons I do still lifes is that I see space as being most significant in relation to small objects. The intimacy of this space is reinforced by the small scale of the canvases. I want to generate a "felt" space which is perceived kinesthetically. To achieve this, I emphasize a sense of movement through the space and de-emphasize the sense of paint on canvas. Thus, the spatial problem influences not only how I deal with composition, contrast, and light, but how I apply paint as well.

In summary, my work uses the still life situation as a ground on which to confront four specific painting problems. Composition, light, contrast, and space are not considered individually, but rather, simultaneously as a matrix within which there can be a progression in the level of deliberation and involvement. The work is not a resolved statement of position, but is instead an indication of direction toward a potential level of resolution.