

Towel tales

'The Common Object' explores the lively art of the still life

BY JANE HOLAHAN
Staff Writer

The still life has been a staple of the art world for centuries.

And to this day, it continues to thrive as a way for artists to express the world around them.

It is a familiar world, one we can all recognize, filled with fruits, flowers and the domestic items we use every day.

The new show at the Lancaster Museum of Art, "The Common Object," includes a dish towel among its domestic items.

Every painting in the exhibit, which opened last week and will run through Feb. 28, features a lowly dish rag somewhere in its frame.

The exhibit features 31 artists and 59 works and that dish rag plays a different role in just about all of them.

Some, like Phyllis Floyd's "My Dishtowels #10" put it center stage. Richard Baker painted his towel exactly as he got it, complete with the price tag.

Catherine Kehoe features her towel on a laundry line in the oil "On the Line," and in another work, it becomes a babushka.

Penny Kronengold gives only a suggestion of one with her oil, "Playing with a Red Dish towel #5."

But other artists incorporated the towel into a larger story.

Sydney Licht has a yellow dish towel folded neatly in front



Martha Armstrong, Tiger Lilies, 2009, oil on canvas.



Susan Cohen, Porch Door with Common Object, 2009, oil on wood.

of a bag of coffee, with a cherry resting on top. The oil painting, "Still Life with Coffee and Tea" is a warm and calm exploration of muted yellows and browns, with the pop of the red cherry.

Tim Kennedy places a knife on top of his dishtowel, with an apple, flowers and scrabble letters on either side of it in his oil "Flowers and Scrabble Tiles."

Margaret McCann has a wild time hiding her dishtowel in her oil painting "Carmen Miranda Still Life," featuring all kinds of fruit on top of a woman's head.

In the oil "Orange, Black and Coil," Bevin Engman rolls up the towel and places it next to several other shapes to create an intriguing landscape.

"Mixed Flowers with Towel," an oil by Sharon Yates, features colorful coneflowers in a vase that are past their prime but still beautiful. The crumpled towel serves as part of the background.

Susan Cohen puts her towel deep into her oil, "Porch Door with Common Object," showing an open door looking out into the woods, the towel serving as a tablecloth on a table on the patio.

"Zeuxis: The Common Object"

Cont. through Feb. 28
Tues.-Sat. 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sun. noon-4 p.m. Free
Lancaster Museum of Art
135 N. Lime St., 394-3497
www.lmapa.org

Robert Jessel uses his towel as a vivid background in his cheerful "Composition with a Checkered Cloth," featuring a copper bowl and a stout pitcher.

The exhibit comes from Zeuxis, an association of still-life painters from all over the country. (Zeuxis was a 5th century Greek painter and it's said that a painting he made of grapes was so lifelike, birds tried to peck at them.)

The group was formed in 1995 to explore the contemporary possibilities of the still life.

Several of its members will be at the Museum on Friday, Feb. 5 to discuss the historical values and unique potential of still life painting. The panel will include Richard Baker, John Goodrich, Ying Li, Sydney Licht and Imogen Smith, who will moderate the discussion.

Visitors are welcome to stop by for some or all of the discussion as they go on their First Friday gallery tours.

The exhibit moves on to Newport News, Va.; New York and then Baltimore by 2012.

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