

Bounty



In Dutch still life work of the 17th century, there is a tradition of painting the banquet table. These images represent abundance and beauty and a feast for the eyes, as well as the palate. My first visit to the Memorial Union building convinced me that the space would benefit from a contemporary expression of this abundance and restful beauty.

Unlike many intimate still life works, this painting is intended to read well from a long distance as well as close up. The dining room of the Memorial Union is large, but people will pass directly beneath the wall where the painting is mounted. To meet this challenge, I have organized the composition in large areas of contrasting drapery, which may be read as abstract shapes from a distance. The still life objects standing on the drapery are scaled at approximately twice life size, and the detail is intended to invite the viewer to inspect closely, and to stroll from one side to the other. Close up, the design is an ensemble of more intimate still life arrangements that interact and blend into each other without boundaries.

To compose the design of the painting, I began by setting up a fourteen foot long arrangement in my studio consisting of peaches, plums, pears, raspberries, apricots, melon, onions, eggplants, olives, guava, red Filipino bananas, avocado, mango, hot chili peppers, cucumbers, red onion, lemon, green pepper, and Asiatic and Casablanca Lilies. I needed a good deal of time and trial and error to find a composition of objects that worked. The arrangement was half the size of the intended painting, and visually quite impressive. Because of the perishable nature of my subjects, I recorded them photographically using color transparencies in a series of overlapping frames.

Rather than using single point perspective, I moved my viewpoint eight times, so that each region of the composition could be viewed directly. With a single viewpoint, many of the objects in such a wide composition would be seen from the side, and this would alter the realism for a close observer. This effect could be reduced by using a very distant viewpoint; but a distant perspective would also alter the appearance of the individual objects, making them flatter and less dramatic. In my painting, the viewpoint shifts subtly as

it would in walking from one end to the other of the actual arrangement of objects.

For many years I have worked with still life compositions viewed from a traditional front-on horizontal position. More recently, I have been exploring subjects viewed from a nearly overhead angle. The traditional separation of foreground and background is eliminated, and the relationship of the viewer to the objects changes in a dramatic and appealing way. My choice of an aerial viewpoint is influenced by the American *trompe l'oeil* painters around 1888, such as William Harnett, whose retrospective I saw in New York a few years ago and greatly admired. The *trompe l'oeil* effect is designed to "fool the eye" into thinking the objects are really there in three dimensional space. This challenge is made possible by using a limited depth of field that includes a background surface with which the objects interact. Light and shadow dramatically emphasize the distance between the plane and the objects. This can be achieved by looking straight at a wall on which objects hang, as in *After the Hunt* by Harnett, or by looking almost straight down from a vantage point above a surface supporting the objects. As an example in my painting, I have attempted to create a dramatic distance between the flowers and the objects below them on the table.

At close range the objects are too big to appear real, but they take on a kind of monumental presence, and the impact of color relationships is heightened. Compositionally, I like to create a field of activity that continues beyond the picture plane, like wallpaper that could go on and on forever. The motif does not repeat, but it does imply a continuation in all directions of the canvas, somehow telling the viewer that it is only a two-dimensional surface, even though the subject seems real.

To match the architecture of the dining hall, I designed a canvas in a long horizontal shape with a gentle curving arch at the top, so it would echo the shape of the ceiling and nearly fill the space of the wall. It is painted in oil over thin acrylic washes on gessoed canvas, using four sections, each seven feet long. These sections are designed to bolt together to form one continuous canvas, so

that the seams are small enough not to be distracting, and the sections form one continuous composition.

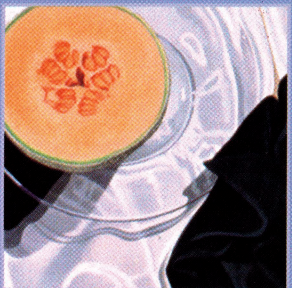
Bounty is the largest work I have painted to date. There is no substitute for painting big. The colors and paint surrounded and enveloped me in a totally different way because there was so much surface area. Painting became a more physical experience with a broader gesture or mark of the brush. I needed constantly to step back to see how the work reads at a distance, and to keep in mind the four sections. My studio is not large enough for the entire painting to be assembled at once, but I was able to paint on two canvasses joined at one time. This made a fourteen foot surface, which sometimes looked like an airplane wing. I changed sections frequently so that I could work on the entire composition before completing any one area. I have been developing other paintings in this long horizontal proportion and continue to find it an intriguing and challenging shape for my work.

While still life painting often has symbolic content there is a tradition of benign subject matter and harmonious composition that is less likely to challenge or confront the viewer. Still life is wonderful because it can be so deeply contemplative. But in creating contemporary extensions of this tradition, I want also to try to engage the viewer more directly, creating a visual experience that is both confronting and inviting. In the case of this painting, I have tried to achieve this by making the objects very large in scale, and presenting them with dramatic perspective. I choose my subject matter for its inherent beauty and arrange it in ways that I find visually interesting and more dramatic in context. The objects may be perceived as simple pleasures, which achieve depth through the viewer's contemplation of their arrangement and interactions. As an artist, I try not to judge why I do things but simply to indulge the impulse, which becomes a drive and at times an obsession. I hope that any persistent viewer of my painting will continue to discover its new and different aspects.

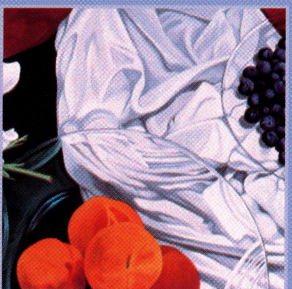
Sherrie Wolf



Restful



Simple



Enveloped

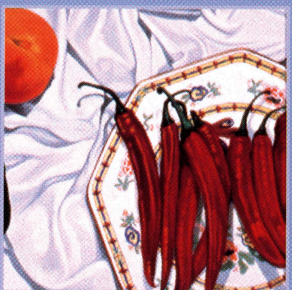


Abundant

Gentle



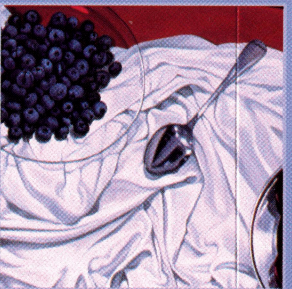
Intimate



Curving



Pleasures



artist
Sherrie Wolf

Title: "Bounty"
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 28 feet long, in four 7-foot sections
Arched, 4 feet high in middle, 2-1/2 feet at ends
Located in the Memorial Union Commons
at Oregon State University

Commissioned through the One Percent for Art Program
of the Oregon Arts Commission in 1995.
Completed & installed in 1996.
Framing & technical assistance
by Framing Resource, Portland
Installation by Keith Jones
Photography by Henry Ngan,
Studio Three, Inc., Portland
Brochure design by Holly Alcott
Memorial Union Design Studio

Sherrie Wolf was born in 1952 in
Portland, Oregon where she has been an
artist for 22 years. She has won awards for
her painting and print-making and has
had numerous solo exhibitions, as well as a
long list of works in juried shows. She has
been commissioned to do work for projects
including One Percent for Art and Art in
Public Places. Her works are represented in
the collections of Bell Telephone in Seattle,
Absolut Vodka Collection at the Seagram
Corporation in New York, Gordon and
Vivian Gilkey Print Collection at the
Portland Art Museum, and a series of com-
missioned lithograph editions called
"Claremont Suite" at the Claremont Hotel
in Oakland. Her work is represented by the
Margo Jacobsen Gallery in Portland.



Sherrie Wolf