A Letter Home, 1989
For the past ten years, Kevin Larson has painted variations on a single still life motif, an apple and pear snugly held in a simple bowl. Among its various permutations, this image has been isolated, multiplied, dissected and erased. It has appeared resting on the edge of a precarious table, hovering in a dimensionless space or poised at the margin of an abstract landscape. It has been shown with exquisite detail, painted flat and colorless or dappled simply by an outline on the bare canvas. Larson has treated the area surrounding the bowl with equal intensity, exploring a seemingly exhaustive variety of surfaces. By applying layers of incompatible paints, varnishes and other liquids, including coffee and wine, Larson has achieved extraordinary textures—from viscous pools to patterned cracks and rills.

Larson's most recent paintings incorporate two significant changes: they are considerably larger than his previous works, and they represent the bowl of fruit from above rather than from the side. The larger scale has the effect of heightening the paintings' abstract quality and somewhat minimizing the preciousness found in his earlier, smaller works. By moving the bowl from above contributes to the effect of perceiving the canvas itself as a table top, thereby creating a tension between our perception of the painted surface as image and object. In several cases, particularly Democracy and Study #1, Larson's compositions suggest that the painted area is a kind of reticence. Their most erotic aspects always remain hidden and, like a traditional memento mori, these still lifes juxtapose sensual fullness with physical decay. The compulsion of desire by sublimation and transpiration has always been inherent in our society, yet given the present conditions surrounding the AIDS epidemic, its expression in Larson's paintings seems particularly timely and apt.

In the context of contemporary painting, Larson's work can be seen as linking two related practices. On the one hand his unflagging repetition of the same still life motif recalls the notion of style as subject matter which informs the "generic" abstractions of painters such as Sherrin Levine and Tim Ebner. On the other hand, Larson's painterly gestures never seem completely ironic. Rather, like the paintings of Mark Innerst and Ross Bleckner, Larson's still lifes maintain a careful balance between subjective expression and objective critique.


Lawrence Rinder
Selected one-person exhibitions:

Nature Morte Gallery, NYC '88;

Curt Marcus Gallery, NYC '89.

Selected group exhibitions:

Venice Biennale, Italy, Aperto '86;

Feature Gallery, Chicago, IL, Head Sex '87;


Selected bibliography about the artist:


Salvioni, Daniela. Review (Curt Marcus Gallery), Flash Art, Summer '87.


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