



TOP ROW FROM LEFT

Tiger Lilies by Martha Armstrong, 2009, oil, 30 x 24.
All artwork this article courtesy Zeuxis.

Ceramic Basket and Towel by John Goodrich, 2009, oil on board, 12 x 16

CENTER ROW FROM LEFT

Porch Door With Common Object by Susan Cohen, 2009, oil on wood, 16 x 12.

Feast of St. Francis by Elizabeth Geiger, 2009, oil, 36 x 30.

Open Cloth and Sweet Peas by Deborah Kirkklun, 2009, collage and watercolor, 13 1/2 x 12 1/2.

BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT

Still Life With Coffee and Tea by Sydney Licht, 2009, oil, 16 x 13.

Carmen Miranda Still Life by Margaret McCann, 2009, oil, 40 x 30.

Still Life With Three Patterns and Six Figures by Megan Williamson, 2009, oil, 22 x 14.

ZEUXIS AND THE ART OF THE EVERYDAY

For a recent show, more than 30 still life painters created a painting incorporating the same ordinary object. The results are revealing, both about the artists themselves and about the value of pausing to examine the common, uncelebrated things that surround us. | **by Michael Gormley**

During sluggish economic times such as these, the need for frugality can sometimes lead to greater overall moderation in thoughts and in actions. In a way, such moderation is a moral undertaking, as lessening one's excesses can lead to a greater understanding of oneself and of what is truly valuable. These concerns bring to mind the archetype of the starving artist, although it may be a romantic conceit. I recall a friend once remarking (in the economically robust 1990s, nonetheless) that artists shouldn't make a lot of money, because the accumulation of wealth can lead to complacency and loss of resourcefulness. My friend may have been right. The artistic process, at least in most traditional media, requires only a moderate investment of material resources—with just a few tubes of paint and a bit of raw canvas an artist can create a whole universe. The artist's more substantial investment is in his or her careful attention to craft along with a sincere search for a genuine self-expression informed by a spirited exploration of life. These aspects of the artistic undertaking are essentially nonmaterial. True artistic expression is, by nature, alchemical—a transformation of nonverbal, often illogical, at times accidental, intents and processes into something singular and unified.

Zeuxis, an association of still life painters, recently played with the idea of humble beginnings in their exhibition "The Common Object." This is an intriguing title, given that paintings are generally considered to be a rarefied, rather than a populist, item. The participating artists were asked to create a still life incorporating the most utilitarian of objects—a kitchen dishtowel. The show offers a meditative alternative to some of the art world's more excessive spectacles. By focusing on the transformation of unspectacular elements into subject matter worthy of artistic engagement, "The Common Object" reveals how the processes of artistic transmutation can alter our view of the world. The