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EDITH SCHLOSS

Edith Schloss' paintings and watercolors suggest an intimate, personal mythology. Even while representing things of this world, she is highly selective in her inclusions and eccentric in style. She has for a long while now concentrated on scenes that can be termed, loosely, *seascapes*, but whose effects are wholly different from the romantic, awesome horizons of 19th-century devotionals to nature. In Schloss' paintings, the ocean is usually a backdrop to a foreground still life drawn with directness, simplicity, and the haphazard accuracy of a spirited and practiced image maker. The sea, in its infinite varieties of blue—navy and turquoise and aquamarine and cobalt—is both a 'true' reflection of the Mediterranean vista Schloss enjoys from her studio in La Serra di Lerici, Italy, as well as a device for all sorts of painterly tactical maneuvers—not the maneuvers of a military campaign whose contingencies are carefully plotted before decisions are fixed upon. Edith Schloss' attack of paint to canvas is generous and intuitive, allowing for gestural expressionist activity. (James Mellow has written of a "wonderful untidiness" to her pictures.) The variety of oceanic or Giottesque blues provides ordering to her compositions—sometimes with fairly dense opaque stretches, other times with washed, thinly veiled coverage.

"... In Maine in the late fifties I let everything go. Then what I always did afterwards came to me when I did not even know it. I was sitting at Dow's point with Phil Pearlstein who was drawing its strange twisted folded rocks. I was painting a watercolor of sea and spruce trees. We had been thinking the same thing we found out when we spoke. Let all that stuff that's inside us, abstraction, go, and concentrate on what is before us. I did not worry anymore. I wanted to paint the pitchers, bottles, flowers I had set up to please my eye and the weather and water beyond them. In the medieval paintings saints were in the foreground, in the background was Tuscany so why not paint pots and jugs against the sea."

The items in her still lifes, such simple things like flowers, jugs, starfish, and maybe a gull or robin, are near enough to looking like the things they are, but we needn't read them only as objects of a three-dimensional world. They are delivered

... it was at the Art Students League where a social conscious teacher of all things taught me about art as something in itself. Paint the sky red Harry Sternberg said, if you see it that way. Dare anything. He charmed us by saying art must be like making love or like a good bowel movement.

... Some years later in a country house in New Jersey I saw a small abstract painting very smooth in complex curves in beiges and greens. It was the kind of abstraction I was looking for. Do you want to meet the man who made it Fairfield Porter asked me. Then one wintry Sunday afternoon he took me to the loft of Bill and Elaine de Kooning in Chelsea. After that I stopped looking out and tried to scoop shapes and colors from within myself.

onto canvas or paper to speak more about color and shape than empirical observation. Her color is bright, her patterns simple, her shapes slightly erratic. The wobbly alignment of objects picnicking on a Mediterranean beach in *Breeze* (1974) advances a mood that is joyful and as freely associative as obscure and complex reverie.

"... Boxes were probably a bridge between writing and painting, part of both. I made them mostly in periods when I was between them. But they were the same as my figurative paintings—really arrangements, still lifes. However found objects evocative and glued down were in style and painted ones were not. Rudy [Burckhardt]

cooperated with Cornell on movies and Joseph at first did not like my boxes but then suddenly he did. There was even someone Durkee who did boxes a little like me. Boxes grow slowly, are full of baggage. Lately I concentrate on painting in oil in watercolor, it is more unencumbered and clean."

The boxes from the 1950s are special partly because they seem so genuinely artless, neither rarified or precious. Neither have they the fine, elegant patina and abundantly textured iconography of Cornell's poetic and haunting work; indeed, their weathered wood and faded momentos seem ready to disintegrate at the slightest breeze or critical interpretation. In *Viva*

Roncalli, for example, the elements Schloss has included are a dried acanthus flower, a mosaic stone, a thistle, a shell fossil, "beach findings," coral, a box and spool, a compass. These items come from disparate points on the globe—the thistle from Greece, the coral from Maine, the miniature compass from a cereal box. The boxes, then, reveal a sensibility as much archaeological as romantic. In them, Schloss unites the slender tracings of both the natural and human-constructed order. As in the paintings of the sea that would come later, her choices suggest an eccentric personal logic whose premises are bittersweet, fragile, and 'naive.'

"... Once on a trip to Provence I went to the Matisse museum and chapel. I saw how all his life he learnt to unlearn while making things clearer to himself. His depth, simplicity and faith was also close to that of the Siennese painters. There is something like this in folk art and in children's paintings which are quite direct and on the way back. All these have become an example." (Ingber, March 1-19)

Allen Ellenzweig

All quotes are from an unpublished manuscript by Edith Schloss. I am indebted to the artist for making this material available to me.



Edith Schloss, *Pink Moon*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 28 x 26". Courtesy Ingber Gallery.