

Janet Fish

The 1980s: Beyond the Still Life



Red Cups and Tulips, 1981. Oil on canvas, 36 x 82 inches. Private Collection.

March 30 – April 29, 2023

Opening Reception Thursday, March 30, 6-8 pm

I don't like hierarchies, it's the environment of the picture that I'm interested in, one thing pulling against another, one area commenting on another...I work to present a situation in which things are interrelated and connected through a flow of movement, light, and color from one form to another.

– Janet Fish

DC Moore Gallery is pleased to present *Janet Fish: Beyond the Still Life*, an exhibition of Janet Fish's paintings and works on paper from the 1980s. This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to see paintings from this period with their profuse compositions of complex objects, active brushwork, vibrant color, and sweeping scale.

Janet Fish was born in Boston in 1938 and, from the age of ten, grew up in Bermuda, to which she attributes her own fascination with bright light and intense color. After attending Smith College, Fish received her MFA from Yale University in 1963, where she was a part of a cohort of diverse artists that included Chuck Close, Richard Serra, Robert Mangold, Rackstraw Downes, Nancy Graves, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, and Brice Marden. This group was intense, ambitious, and competitive, motivating one another to develop and defend their work. At Yale, Fish was taught Abstract Expressionism, the predominant painting style of the time, which focused on the subconscious and emotional state of the artist. Encouraged by Alex Katz, her teacher during her

summer of 1962 at The Skowhegan School and Painting & Sculpture, Fish began capturing the physical world through painting landscapes, proving to be a breakthrough in her artistic practice.

Starting in the later 1960s, Fish began to paint mundane objects in her studio. As she explored more subjects, she became drawn to (and amused by) the look of commercial products, such as cellophane-encased packages of supermarket fruit and Windex bottles. Fascinated by the way light would travel through and animate translucent and clear objects, she focused her paintings on these objects and the effects of light in increasingly large canvases. The banality of these mass-produced items had a Pop art sensibility, but the beauty of the paint and brushwork was uniquely her own. She insisted that her subject matter was unimportant, for her work was not about narrative. For Fish, meaning was determined by the energetic application of paint, dynamism of luminosity, textures, color, and scale.

Following her success with painting in the 1970s, Fish felt the need to further challenge herself. She started bringing the outside world into her works, no longer making them self-contained worlds. She continued to explore this expanded point of view until, because of physical limitations, she stopped painting in 2009. Her work in the 1980s saw the beginning of Fish embracing slices of landscape, both urban and rural, the translucent quality of flowers, and figures—friends, neighbors, and pets. Fish still allowed the concept of light to carry the energy and movement within her artwork, with color being the most essential attribute. The considerable time required to create these elaborate paintings only allowed Fish to complete a limited number each year.

Football (1986) captures Fish's insatiable desire to push her painting and to explore a multitude of subjects during this period. This painting highlights the innovations that Fish brought to her work of the 1980s and serves, according to art critic Gerrit Henry, as "an homage to the American way of life...in its attitude of indulgence toward all these passions. It's a giant masterpiece of wit leavened by hunger, private humor offset by sociocultural realities." A television sits on a table, tuned to a football game. The sports section of a newspaper and a multitude of snack foods are strewn across the table in front of the TV. Beyond the table, cars pass by on the street below. Light plays a key part in the nighttime scene, with the artificial light of the TV illuminating the room. Fish depicts the light bouncing off of and surrounding the objects, creating spaces of brightness and darkness, with shadows stretching across the wooden floor.



Football, 1986. Oil on canvas, 70 x 50 inches.

Works by Janet Fish are included in many museum collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum; Buffalo AKG Art Museum; Cleveland Museum of Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Detroit Institute of Arts; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art; and Yale University Art Gallery. Janet Fish lives in New York City and rural Vermont.

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Caroline Magavern at cmagavern@dcmooregallery.com.