



*Summer Tea Time*, 1978. Oil on linen, 30 x 25 inches

## Jane Wilson

### Reflected Still Life

February 17 through  
March 26, 2022

*“Still life is indoor, tactile, and physical, about touch, texture, and weight, substance, and the intimate distances in between.”*

-Jane Wilson

DC Moore Gallery is pleased to present *Jane Wilson: Reflected Still Life*, an exhibition examining the artist's still life paintings, particularly those of the late 1970s.

Jane Wilson (1924-2015) was an American painter who was integral in the downtown New York art scene beginning in the 1950s, along with contemporaries Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan, and Helen Frankenthaler. As a painter whose focus for most of her career was on her external surroundings, especially early cityscapes and later landscapes, the introspective period beginning in the late 1960's and continuing into the early 1980's, in which she was occupied with the still life, was pivotal.

For Wilson, the still life served as a vehicle of exploration for her medium, referring to them as “landscapes on tables.”<sup>i</sup> The arrangements were set up in her New York City studio where she became fascinated with exploring the relationship of objects to one another and to their surrounding space.

As curator and art historian Lilly Wei writes, “Like musical études, [Wilson] painted her chosen objects repeatedly, intently, with variations, studying them from a multitude of angles under varying conditions until she was satisfied.”<sup>ii</sup> It was through this direct, consistent observation of her still life arrangements that informed her use of color, and her approach to abstraction and light upon the same setting. In *Summer Tea Time* (1978) and *Winter Tea Time* (1978-79), the same collection of vases and dishes can be recognized as set upon a table with a drapery. Observed at different times and seasons, as evidenced by the titles, *Summer Tea Time* is infused with warmer, sunlit hues, while *Winter Tea Time* appears as if bright silver light has enveloped the room.

The signature luminosity and expressionistic yet spare quality of her paintings for which she became best-known was developed through her exploration of the still life during this decade-long period. To achieve the radiance and depth of color in her paintings, Wilson developed a unique painting technique. Instead of the common technique of direct painting, which involves applying wet paint to wet paint, Wilson discovered that a richness and complexity of color application could best be attained through indirect painting, with a wet layer of paint placed upon a dry one. This approach allowed each layer of color to stand on its own instead of being muted by the layer on top of it. As Wei explains, “the colors bloomed, reflected and refracted through the multiple layers.”<sup>iii</sup>



*Winter Tea Time*, 1978-79. Oil on linen, 30 x 25 inches

A catalogue with Lilly Wei’s essay, *Notes Toward a Supreme Painting*, accompanies the exhibition.

Jane Wilson (1924 - 2015) was a presence in the New York art world from her arrival in 1949 until her death in 2015. Born in 1924 on her family’s farm in Seymour, Iowa, Wilson attended the University of Iowa to study painting. Arriving in New York City, she and her husband, John Gruen, settled in Greenwich Village and soon immersed themselves in the downtown art scene. Wilson was a founding member of the legendary Hansa Gallery in the 1950s, where she had three solo shows in 1953, 1955, and 1957. She also participated in important group shows during these years, such as one in 1952 at Tanager Gallery, another of the most active artists’ cooperatives, and in three annual exhibitions from 1953 to 1955 at the Stable Gallery on West 58th Street.

In the early 1960s, her career as an artist began to take off. The Museum of Modern Art acquired a large landscape, *The Open Scene*, in 1960, and Andy Warhol commissioned her to paint his portrait, *Andy and Lilacs*, which he subsequently donated to the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the early 1980s, Wilson made a decisive move to a more personal and expressive landscape painting, which she continued to explore for the remainder of her career. In addition to painting, Wilson was also a visiting

professor at colleges and universities across the country, including thirteen years at the Columbia University School of the Arts, where she was Acting Chair from 1986-88.

Jane Wilson's paintings are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, PA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, as well as other museums across the country.



*Double Still Life: Afternoon*, 1978. Oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches

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<sup>i</sup> Mimi Thompson, "Jane Wilson: Transforming the Everyday," in *Seen and Unseen: Jane Freilicher and Jane Wilson* (Parrish Art Museum, 2015), p. 84.

<sup>ii</sup> Lilly Wei, "Notes Toward a Supreme Painting," in *Jane Wilson: Reflected Still Life* (DC Moore Gallery, 2022), p. 11.

<sup>iii</sup> Wei, p. 12.