



A Closer Look

Andrew Shears

Andrew Shears in his studio

Photo: Anna Kooris

Wholeness, Harmony, Radiance: The Paintings of Andrew Shears

“The first step in the direction of beauty is to understand the frame and scope of the imagination, to comprehend the act itself of aesthetic apprehension.”

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

The artwork of Andrew Shears belies his 30 years. Skillfully astute and conceptually profound, the artist’s paintings transcend the noise and agitation of our technologically frenzied culture.

Shears’s work centers on his unconventional experiences with the mundane. Through beguilingly simple subject matter primitively centralized in composition, the work emanates wholeness. Portraits of ordinary, single objects or solitary, familiar places, viewed straight on as if in a mutual encounter, remind us of something we’ve perhaps felt before—something now articulated in a different and specific way. We recall, in the words of James Joyce, being “arrested by beauty.”

Conceptually, Shears begins a work with his own moment of aesthetic arrest—from the stillness of seeing something that stops the mind “above desire and loathing.”* He then blends three tools: photographic reference, his memory of the subject, and the subject itself.

The compositions have a rhythmic structure of formal lines, balanced shape against shape. The palette is subdued, calm, and harmonic. A single object is bound by the canvas edges and lit with a single light source to suggest that the object is an entity complete unto itself. Even when the subject is a place rather than an object, the abiding sense is of wholeness, of the place as a single object.



Andrew Shears, *Taboret*, oil on canvas, 50" x 40"

For Shears, realism serves as a structure for abstraction. Deliberate areas of flatness in an otherwise realistic depiction and unfettered mark-making on the flat surface remind us that the painting itself is an object. One looks through the surface to the illusion, then oscillates between the beauty of the object and the beauty of the surface.

The ultimate effect of a painting (an object) of a subject (also an object) is a subtle altering of the viewer's experience of space. A stillness exists between the surface and the illusion. As in meditation, there is a melding of observer with observed. We are sand-

wiched between two mirrors, seeing an image endlessly repeated, no beginning, no end.

This stillness first emerges in the studio, as Shears's relationship to the artwork deepens and shifts. As the subject goes from new to aged with repeated passes of the brush, the artist leaves behind his three conceptual tools and responds only to the work itself. Painting becomes a perceptual meditation of shapes, color, line, edges, and contrast, as he builds both the illusion and surface texture of the artwork.



Andrew Shears, *Parking Lot at Midday*, oil on canvas, 15" x 19"

Shears's conceptual and perceptual processes are meant to serve the viewer's experience. Without this concern, there would be no reason to leave his reference and memory, and a beautiful, accurate rendering would be sufficient. Instead, the artist's primary motivations are visual impact and stillness. Likely these grew from a young life filled with many moments stilled by beauty.

Perhaps the artist's intention can be better explained by what some thoughtful authors have written about beauty and meaning.

From James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which is the "whatness" of a thing. . . . The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the dear radiance of the aesthetic image is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony in the luminous silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure, a spiritual state, very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani . . . called the enchantment of the heart.

And from Joseph Campbell, in *Mythic Worlds, Modern Words: Joseph Campbell on the Art of James Joyce*, writing about the passage above:

The aesthetic experience is a simple beholding of the object. . . . You experience a radiance. You are held in aesthetic arrest. . . . When we are in the presence of great beauty our minds go still.

Andrew Shears's goal to share his spiritual appreciation for overlooked objects and spaces ultimately leaves one with a stilled mind and an enchantment of the heart.

—Susan Guevara

Right: Andrew Shears, *Garage Reflection*, oil on canvas, 48" x 36"

