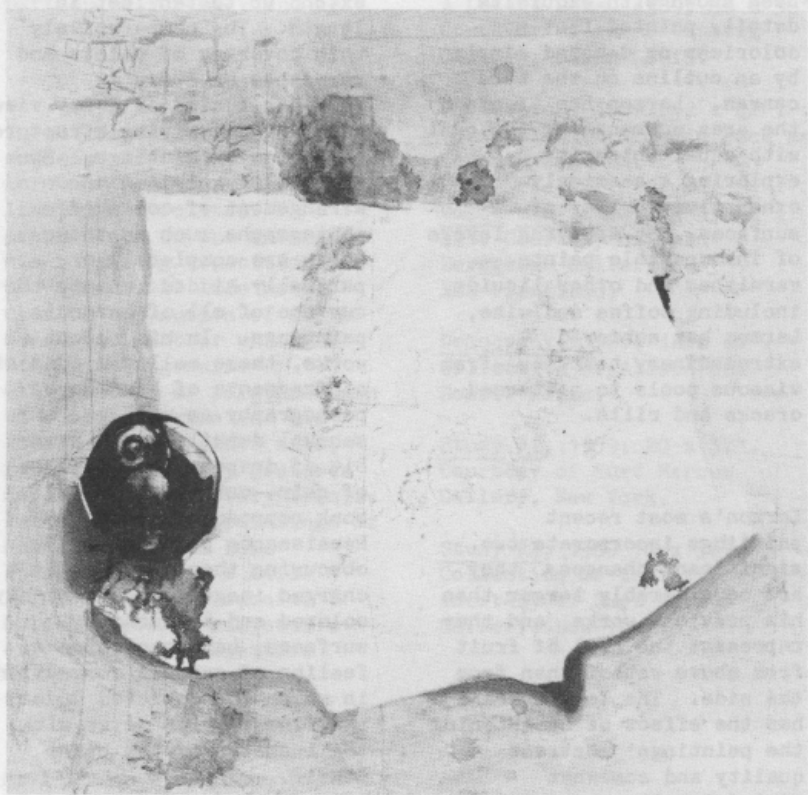


A Letter Home, 1989



For the past ten years, Kevin Larmon has painted variations on a single still life motif, an apple and pear snugly held in a simple bowl. Among its various permutations, this image has been isolated, multiplied, dissected and erased. It has appeared resting on the edge of a precarious table, hovering in a dimensionless space or poised at the margin of an abstract landscape. It has been shown with exquisite detail, painted flat and colorless or denoted simply by an outline on the bare canvas. Larmon has treated the area surrounding the bowl with equal intensity, exploring a seemingly exhaustive variety of surfaces. By applying layers of incompatible paints, varnishes and other liquids, including coffee and wine, Larmon has achieved extraordinary textures--from viscous pools to patterned cracks and rills.

Larmon's most recent paintings incorporate two significant changes: they are considerably larger than his previous works, and they represent the bowl of fruit from above rather than from the side. The larger scale has the effect of heightening the paintings' abstract quality and somewhat minimizing the preciousness found in his earlier, smaller works. Showing the bowl from above contributes to the effect of perceiving the canvas itself as a table top, thereby creating a tension between our perception of the painted surface as image and object. In several cases, particularly Democracy and Study #1, Larmon's compositions suggest that the painted area is a kind of

trompe l'oeil table cloth. In others, such as Death and Taxes and Protection, the build-up of paint and layering of lines and stains emphasize the paintings' vertical surface over the illusion of horizontality.

The two diptychs in the exhibition are studies for future paintings which will extend up to ten feet in length. The comparatively thin covering of paints and varnishes on Study #2 provides a kind of X-ray view into the underlying structure of Larmon's paintings. Here one can clearly see an arrangement of collaged photographs such as those which are completely or partially hidden beneath the surface of all of Larmon's paintings. In his recent works, these collages consist of fragments of hard-core pornography as well as sensual details--such as a bit of drapery or a glimpse of skin--cut out from art book reproductions of Renaissance paintings. By obscuring these erotically charged images beneath richly colored and textured surfaces, Larmon creates a feeling of sensual congestion in which the depicted nudes and fine fabrics merge with the lushness of the paint itself.

By equating sexual allure--whether represented in "high" or "low" culture--with the torrid surfaces of his paintings, Larmon points to a sublimated sexual drive as underlying our society's hunger to derive satisfaction from art objects. In Larmon's paintings, however, seduction is tempered by

reticence. Their most erotic aspects always remain hidden and, like a traditional memento mori, these still lifes juxtapose sensual fullness with physical decay. The complication of desire by sublimation and trepidation has always been inherent in our society, yet given the present conditions surrounding the AIDS epidemic, its expression in Larmon's paintings seems particularly timely and apt.

In the context of contemporary painting, Larmon's work can be seen as linking two related practices. On the one hand his unflinching repetition of the same still life motif recalls the notion of style as subject matter which inform the "generic" abstractions of painters such as Sherrie Levine and Tim Ebner. On the other hand, Larmon's painterly gestures never seem completely ironic. Rather, like the paintings of Mark Innerst and Ross Bleckner, Larmon's still lifes maintain a careful balance between subjective expression and objective critique.

Kevin Larmon was born in Syracuse, New York in 1955. He received a B.F.A. from Harper College, S.U.N.Y., Binghamton, and currently resides in upstate New York.

Lawrence Rinder

Works in MATRIX:

Black Table, 1988, 38 x 40".
Courtesy of Curt Marcus
Gallery, New York.

Spoon, 1988, 38 x 40".
Collection of Paul Anderson.

Green Table, 1988, 36 x 40".
Courtesy of Galerie Montenay,
Paris.

A Letter Home, 1989, 38 x 38".
Courtesy of the Greenberg
Gallery, Saint Louis.

Protection, 1989, 42 x 42".
Collection of Kristin Peck and
Kenneth Goldman.

Death and Taxes, 1989, 42 x
42". Courtesy of John
Berggruen Gallery,
San Francisco.

Democracy, 1989, 42 x 40".
Collection of Alison and
Donald Weiss.

Study #1, 1989, 20 x 37".
Courtesy of Curt Marcus
Gallery, New York.

Study #2, 1989 18 x 38".
Collection of the artist,
courtesy of Curt Marcus
Gallery, New York.

Selected one-person
exhibitions:

Nature Morte Gallery, NYC
'88;

Curt Marcus Gallery, NYC '89.

Selected group exhibitions:

Venice Biennale, Italy,
Aperto 86;

Feature Gallery, Chicago, IL,
Head Sex '87;

Michael Kohn Gallery, L.A.
'88.

Selected bibliography about
the artist:

Collins, Tricia &
Richard Milazzo. Forced
Sentiment, exhibition
catalogue, Artists Space, NY
'84.

Lichtenstein, Theresa.
Review, Arts Magazine, Sept.
'84.

Salvioni, Daniela.
Review (Curt Marcus Gallery),
Flash Art, Summer '87.

Gipe, Lawrence. Review
(Michael Kohn Gallery),
Artweek, Feb. '88.

Schwendenwien, Jude.
Review (Curt Marcus Gallery),
Artforum, Oct. '88.

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