

Arts & Entertainment

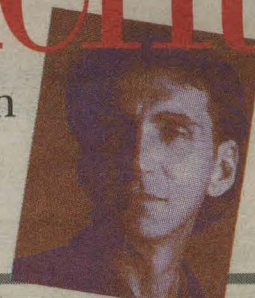
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Hartley finds order in the art of still life



"Pear and Plum," still life by Hartley.

By Kevin Mullaney

BANNER CORRESPONDENT

The still life paintings of Katherine Ann Hartley, like the Dutch Masters whose style she reflects, are extraordinary. Each object is carefully chosen and arranged just so — a lustreware pitcher, apricots and pears, leaves, china cups and iron pots, old glass vases, bottles, a bowl overflowing with fruit. Natural and familiar, with rich colors on a dark background, there is a simple, formal elegance to the life-like worlds she creates, a throwback to a more opulent time.

Hartley is one of several artists showing at the Kiley Court Gallery, 445 Commercial St., Provincetown, and will be present at a reception Friday night at 7 p.m. to kick off the annual Labor Day Weekend Group Show. A longtime contributor to the gallery, Hartley's star is on the rise.

An energetic, 42-year-old mom, she did not set out to be an artist. In a sense, art came to her, through life and its coinci-

dences, and painting still lifes is as much who she is as what she does. "I love what I'm doing," she says. "It's so fun, totally satisfying. Each painting is an entirely new experience." She loves the sense of order fundamental to still life painting. "I don't like chaos," she says, both in life and in her work. "There's a certain look of things being in place, where you want them to be, that looks good."

"It's decorative, pleasing to the eye, not an intellectual experience," Hartley says of the Dutch Masters style. "You look at it and you understand what you're seeing. What I'm looking for," she adds, "are beautiful, voluptuous shapes, beautiful colors." Despite her relatively young artistic career she has developed her own, modern variation on the theme — her setups are simpler than the elaborate, cascading arrangements so prevalent with the Dutch baroque still life painters. Her backgrounds are finished, not smoky, her colors brighter,



PHOTOS KEVIN MULLANEY

Katherine Ann Hartley with her daughter, Grace.

more vibrant. And there are no dead animals.

A Cape Cod native, Hartley grew up in Chatham and Orleans, graduating from Nauset Regional High School in 1976. A good student, she actually skipped eighth grade. Her mom, Mary Katherine, is an accomplished watercolorist. Her dad, the late Peter Hartley, whom she describes as a "Cape Cod kind of guy," was a teacher at Cape Cod Community College and Chatham High School and a writer for the Cape Cod Times. She also has a brother, Robert, who lives in Hawaii.

Hartley left the Cape at 18 to travel around, a couple of years in Alaska, six in Arizona. Gregarious by nature, she loved waitressing, meeting people, talking. At 29 years old, Hartley began to think about what she wanted to do with her life, and began with a painting class at

Scottsdale Community College. She had a ball and started taking private classes in oils.

Meanwhile, for a couple of years she had been house-sitting for a man named John Court, living in his house and taking care of it while he was away, building a home in the Azores. Court, an accomplished portrait and still life painter who was also head of the art department at Cornell University, saw her work, got interested and made her an extraordinary offer: if she promised to work hard, he would tutor her in the Azores. She took care of one of his houses and he set her up with a studio.

For the next six months Hartley painted every day, all day, over and over doing little set ups of objects and making "washes." Court would have her lay a wash over a canvas and then wipe out her subject. Hart-

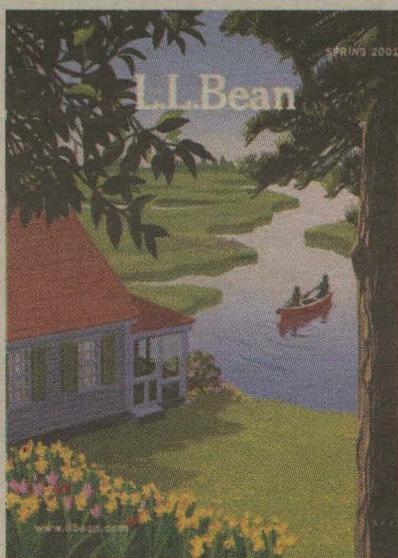
ley amassed about 80 of these sketches. They were extremely crude compared to her current work, but she remembers one in particular, not so much for the piece as for the way she felt when she was doing it. "I look at that painting now and I don't see it to be such a special thing," she says, but Court told her she had to go to New York City and study under David Lefel, a modern day master of still lifes. "Listen," Court said, offering her the best advice she has ever received. "Listen to everything he has to say."

"It was amazing that I had somebody who pushed me so hard, and," she says, "it was interesting because what he had me do was the exact opposite of who he sent me to. You're not drawing, you're massing them in, making them out of lights

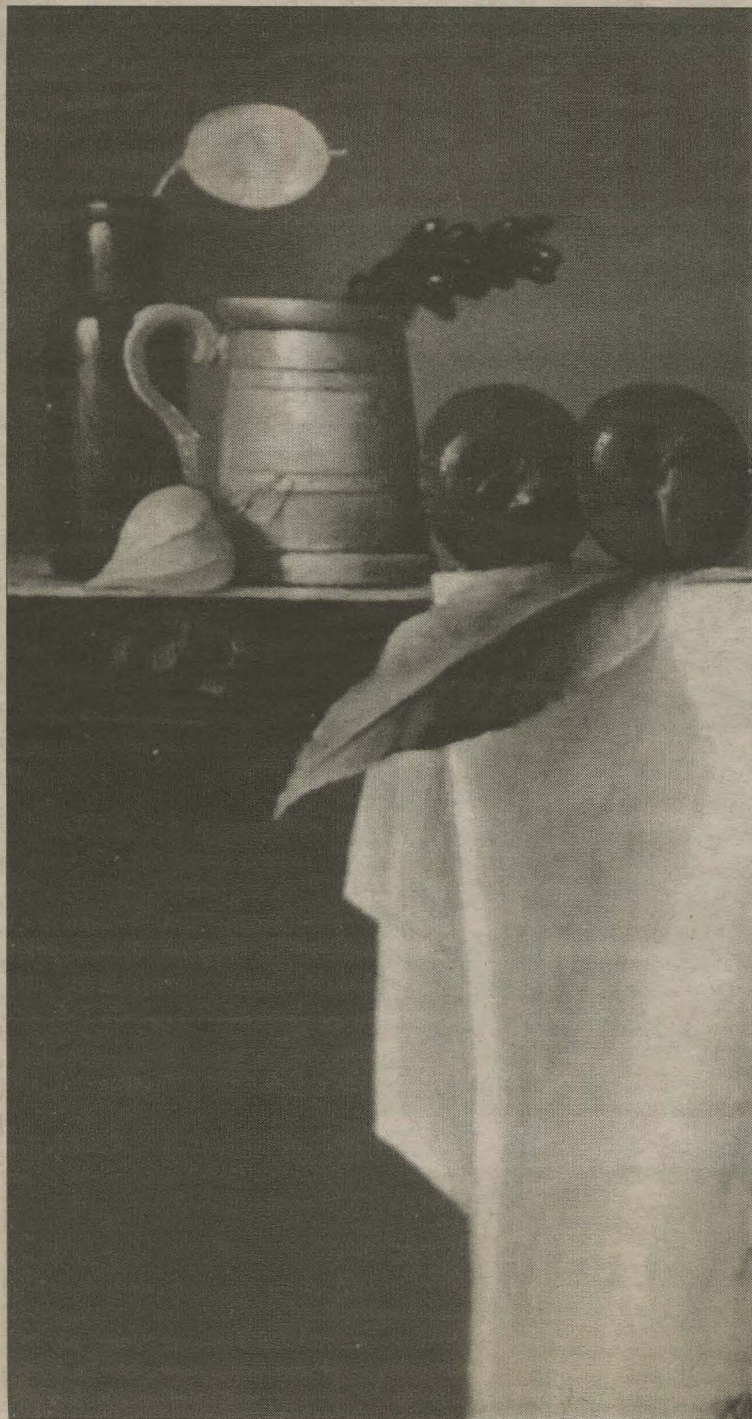
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"Secret Passions," a self-portrait by Bunny Pearlman, who holds joint citizenship in the U.S. and Israel and spends a part of each year in both countries. Through her art she looks at the peace process and her own spiritual side. See story on page 43.



This painting of Oren Sherman's was one of several used for L.L.Bean catalog covers this year. See story page 46.



"White Cloth with Red Plums," by Hartley.

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and shadows." With Leffel, she learned to start with dark and work up to the lights.

Waitressing at night at an artist hangout in Soho called Fenelli's, Hartley studied under Leffel — at the Art Student's League and privately — for two years, until Leffel retired and moved to New Mexico in 1992. In New York, Hartley soon took a big step by renting a studio at Union Square. On a visit to the Cape in 1994 she met Barbara and Bobby Cardinal and has been showing at their Kiley Court gallery ever since. She married Leo Weikert in 1995, they moved to Eastham in '96, and their daughter, Grace, was born in 1999.

Around the time her daughter was born, a customer she had waited on at Fenelli's called her. He was working at the David Findlay Gallery on Madison Avenue and 77th Street and, as a 40th birthday gesture, asked her to send a couple of paintings. Her prices tripled immediately, and the show sold out in two weeks. She had her second showing there last October.

"Often we are so distracted that we forget to focus on what's going on right in front of us," Hartley says. "Painting centers me [that way]. Painting forces me to focus on the present, looking at objects, at

that moment." Painting, she says, is "the desire to focus a certain way, an attempt to be truthful with what you see. One of the most important things is to be able to look at something and see what qualities there are that make it beautiful, to try to define that."

From the beginning Hartley made a conscious decision to keep her artwork free of any anxiety and negative feelings she may have in daily life, a small window of freedom from worry and self-consciousness that opened the door to a new world. "When I'm focused and relaxed, things do totally fall into place. It's just a matter of going through the motions, one brush stroke at a time. It's effortless. You know it's gonna come out good. All through the painting, at each place you stop, it would look done," she says. "A good painting has to

look good all the way through."

Most important, she says, are the objects themselves, their characteristics — the textures, shapes, colors. Other important aspects are the light and atmosphere in the studio, the color of the walls, the focus and direction of light. "Take any one of these elements away and it wouldn't work, but put it together in the right way, the effects can be dazzling."

"I've refined what I want more," she says of her current work. "I'm focused on a particular style that is more me than David Leffel now, a little of a modern look on an old style, working with the bright color, a brighter background."

Painting, she says, "is everything I want — beauty, light, stillness, peacefulness, quiet. I create that atmosphere in the studio, and that's what it does to me. It's my sanity." □