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Not Just Cabbage and Broccoli: The Zeuxis artist group's new exhibition at the Cantor Gallery presents a variety of new takes on the traditional art of still life painting.

Zeuxis Tabletop Arena

By Heather Sperling
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When browsing the annals of ancient Greek art history, one is bound to come across the name Zeuxis—a legendary Greek artist whose fame was at its height during the Peloponnesian Wars of the 5th century B.C. Zeuxis is credited with having helped to develop the technique of painting light and shadow, thus creating depth and imbuing figures and objects with a realism hitherto unseen in painting. According to the legend, Zeuxis' talent was so great that he once painted a still life with grapes appearing so luscious and real that birds came to peck at the canvas.

Following in the footsteps of the famous Greek is the contemporary artist group of the same name, whose exhibit entitled "Tabletop Arenas" is at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery through February 20. The exhibit's 31 artists have set the expansion and improvement of a well known and conventional form—the still life—as their goal. Table-top still lives compose the entire exhibit, yet the result is neither homogeneous nor repetitive; it is incred-

ibly varied and exciting. Stylistically, the paintings run the gamut of painterly approaches, ranging from the almost childishly simple to the mechanically precise to the abstract.

Victor Pesce paints his "Long Rectangular Box" with visible strokes, eye-popping colors, and wavy, imprecise edges, while William Banley paints a similarly basic tableau of bottles on a table ("Terra Nouva") with a precision that is extreme and surreal. Other works, such as Phyllis Floyd's "Blue," are painted in a straightforward and approachable style, but with beautiful tonal variation and quality of light that we rarely perceive with our own eyes. Herein lies the power of this simply presented exhibition—each of the incredibly varied paintings pulls the viewer into the unique space created within it. At times it is a comfortable and familiar one; at other times it is confusing. But invariably we retreat, feeling as though we have learned a little more about not only a genre but also the everyday objects we so often take for granted.

The exhibition's mission statement reads: "the exploration of traditional and not-so-tradi-

tional configurations of still lives." According to an interview with artist and exhibit organizer Gabriel Laderman, "it is an attempt to see whether new poetic insights could still sit within relatively normative still life paintings."

These works are exercises in the expression of metaphor and poetry that plays with the concepts of representation of objects, life, and the self. In other words, they attempt to endow one of the oldest forms of painting with evocative properties and new symbolism, for, as one of the contributors said, "metaphor is central to our work—our paintings are not just about cabbages and broccoli."

Visit "Tabletop Arenas" at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery in the Whitehead Campus Center Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 12 p.m.-5 p.m. Take a moment out of your day to witness this vibrant exhibit and to see one of the oldest forms of painting as you've rarely seen it before. In my esteem, at almost 2500 years old, the still life is looking pretty good.

For more information on the Zeuxis association of still life painters, visit www.zeuxis.us.