

Still Life With Orange Pot by Sydney Licht

Negative space has weight in still lifes

By Eva Heisler
For The Dispatch

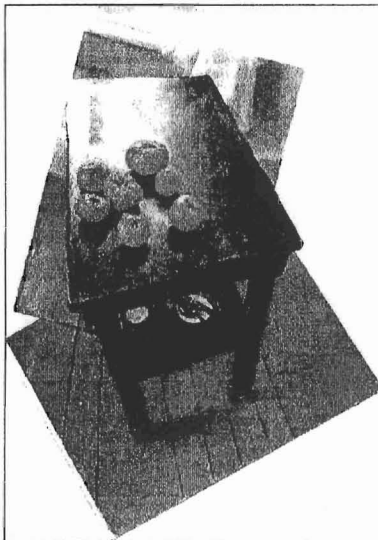
Beth Edwards, Sydney Licht and Stacey Davidson have responded in different ways to the conventions of still-life painting in "Still Life: Three Ohio Painters," an exhibition that provides an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of this genre.

In Davidson's paintings, common objects are isolated and arranged on a field of flat color. In *Dinner*, six cuts of uncooked meat and one glass of water are arrayed on an expanse of sapphire blue.

The rich, saturated color of the background reminds one of the velvet linings of display cases. The perspective is such that the viewer appears to be looking down on the objects as if they have been set out — not for use but for inspection.

In *Breakfast*, an iron skillet, a spoon, a pair of men's shoes, a cracked egg, a glass of orange juice and blue high-heeled shoes float in a void. The presentation of these household goods in limbo — the egg floating far from the skillet in which it will be transformed into breakfast — evokes the uneasy alliances of domestic life.

A black shoe, an orange pot, shells and a pine cone recur in Licht's small paintings. Licht's palette is muted, and contours are reduced to elementary, nearly abstract forms. Objects are painted slightly above eye level, and the edge of the shelf along which they have been placed forms a horizon line above which the visible is no longer familiar.



Tomatoes by Stacey Davidson

The black table on which sit seven tomatoes becomes a hub of disjointed and competing lines of perspective. The lines of the wood floor, the edges of the table and the very edges of the sheets of paper send our eyes in different directions.

What all three artists share is a preoccupation with negative space — the space that surrounds forms. At her best, Davidson fragments that space in an attempt to mimic the movement of the eye, which itself is never still. Edwards, on the other hand, empties the background of all inflection but color and so dramatizes her rendering of the particulars of our lives. In the paintings of Licht, the negative space possesses a weight and history in which both natural and manufactured objects are wedged.

DENISON UNIVERSITY

■ "Still Life: Three Ohio Painters" continues through Feb. 16 at Denison University's University Art Gallery in Burke Hall on College Street in Granville, Ohio. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 1-4 p.m. Sunday. Call 587-6255.

The backgrounds of these oil paintings are unusual grayish-greens. The surfaces are cracked and rough, as if built upon the ruins of other paintings. The background appears more palpable than the objects themselves; and the paint, pushed right up to the forms, seems to threaten effacement.

A number of Licht's easel studies also are on view. These lack the texture of the paintings, but they invite one to ponder the process through which Licht arrives at her modest but quite lovely compositions.

Davidson's still-life paintings are anything but still. Views of the same setting from different perspectives are reassembled into an interior that is visually jarring.

In *Tomatoes*,