Many times in life, and especially as artists, we can find ourselves at odds with antithetical objectives. Betzen states hers thusly, “I’m trying to immortalize an image while recognizing that the process is futile.” Knowing that the endeavor is futile however, the question becomes, “how does one grapple with mortality in style”

Betzen answers the question for us with ‘Apartment Window’. The small painting illustrates a window with an ambiguous view, the lower half of which is blocked for the most part by three potted plants on a folding stand. The light is radiant and bounces from surface to surface as it leads the viewer around the window frame. The scene is most certainly painted from life. Betzen forgoes personal details in the scene in lieu of murky and silhouetted objects and directs her energy instead to the application of paint. There is an economy to brushwork, the minimum necessary to express the idea, but certainly no scarcity of paint. Betzen gooped it on with expressive strokes and allowed it to freely mingle with the other gobs of paint, creating muddy colors and exciting edges. In this small painting Betzen demonstrates both her skill as a painter and confidence in the audience’s ability to read the image.

“Mark-making in a painting or sculpture is the act of embedding an object with my reaction to an image and allows the viewer to re-imagine that experience,” says Betzen. Other times she seeks to create interest through ambiguity. Forcing the viewer to contemplate and seek the reward of clarity, only then can it be valued. Her low relief carvings seem almost as if they exist to benefit the viewer to better understand the paintings, freezing her deft marks in the soft substrate and illustrating the process of carving out a painting from a blank surface. She uses ceramic tools to scrape and carve clay tiles which are then bisque fired. She then paints the surface with handmade egg tempera paint to emphasize or disguise her marks, asking the viewer to keep locked in for an extra moment.

Betzen makes her own paint concerned primarily with creating a material with the “perfect viscosity,” for applying the thick and expressive marks she favors. She often uses subdued and earthy colors in her paintings. The dusty palette itself conjures thoughts of sun-bleached vinyl siding and a dusty Midwest afternoon sky. Once the colors are applied to her sculptures of mobile homes and domestic objects, the colors serve to place the viewer more firmly into the rustic world she wishes to elicit.

Domestic space can be untidy and disheveled and drab, and Betzen is here to celebrate that. Using primarily cardboard and encaustic wax she recreates mundane objects such as tissue boxes and sandwiches that transport the viewer into a domestic scene. Commemorating these often ignored or overlooked objects might stir up far off memories of morning sunlight filtering into your childhood kitchen, or perhaps time spent playing with similar replica objects in a Playskool kitchen. This work invites the viewer to revisit both while contemplating the artist’s mark, her signature on her own memory of these household items. Betzen’s constructions can be rough around the edges-- the crusts are most decidedly not cut off of the sandwiches in her kitchen-- but such is the nature of domestic space.

- John Defeo
TITLE
Tissue Box

MEDIUM
Cardboard & Encaustic

YEAR
2020

SIZE
Dimensions Variable
TITLE:
5 SORROWFUL CONTEMPLATIONS
OF SPACE, PART 1

MEDIUM
STONEWARE BISQUE PAINTED
W/ EGG TEMPERA

YEAR
2020

SIZE
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE
TITLE: APARTMENT WINDOW

MEDIUM OIL ON CANVAS

YEAR 2019

SIZE DIMENSIONS VARIABLE
DIVISION OF ART M.F.A.
QUALIFYING EXHIBITION

MARCH 28 – APRIL 18, 2020

This 2020 M.F.A. thesis exhibition is the culmination of two years of intensive work by M.F.A. candidates in the Division of Art and feature works in a wide-ranging variety of styles and mediums.