

BETSY PODLACH

The image of a woman--her arms crossed, her gaze open--stands before the viewer, inquiringly. With her head a tilt, is she issuing a challenge, is she sternly defiant, or is she rather alluringly self-contained, a woman in control of her own fate? Her eyes miss nothing. What if she is disrobing? What if she is lucky in love? The mystery of Betsy Podlach's paintings involves questions like these. The way a head "sits" on a neck and shoulder, the way a piece of green fruit fits like a lid on a glass container, the way the "imperfect" white skin of the painting mirrors the "imperfect" white skin of the body--these are the delights of her work, delights which involve economy of structure, subtlety of surface, and intuitive know-how.

The liberties she takes with anatomy and surface verisimilitude are the liberties she needs to convey the feeling she is trying for. Betsy's figures couple intimately, their undisguised modesty speaks of a world in which love is possible, touch is necessary, the person is central. Apparent crudenesses of brushwork are intentional, an artistic convention that never fails to confess that the painting is an illusion of an actual space, that the hand of the artist has worked that surface for its own aesthetic good.

At this late date, our sense of the figural body has been so dominated by photographic imagery that it can be challenging to see what a painting does that no other art form can do, which is to summarize a range of formal and emotional concerns in a small rectangular format that addresses the real by making something real of itself: a painting. That this artist gives pride of place to the face and body of the figure links her up with the greatest of art's traditions: painting as an image of man.

There is something vulnerable and immediate about her figures as they pose, wait, anticipate, embrace. Invested with nearly monumental physical presence, contained by lovely soft-edged lines, Podlach's subjects remain civilized, alert to the mammalian moment, neither overdetermined, nor underestimated. As projections of her own body in the world, her paintings give immediate value and a kind of temporal permanence to the slippery evanescence of life.

Gessey Young