

F A B L E D
F L O R A



CLAIRE ROSEN
YELENA STROKIN
ROBERT LANGHAM
JULIA MCLAURIN

FOTO RELEVANCE HOUSTON TEXAS

FEB 19 - APR 16, 2021

COVER: Claire Rosen

Table Still Life

Archival pigment print

18 x 24" • Edition of 10

30 x 40" • Edition of 7

45 x 60" • Edition of 3

F A B L E D
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"These still life images aim not to grab your attention, but hold your attention, to reflect the full scope of human experience, the beauty and the darkness. The viewer is invited to contemplate the complexity of life rather than escape from it."

– Claire Rosen

STILL LIFE STORIES: "FABLED FLORA"

GEOFFREY C. KOSLOV

A "still life", whether a painting, photograph or a multimedia creation, brings to mind an assembly of flowers, bowls, bottles and other objects, natural or man-made, arranged on some type of table surface. What constitutes a "still life" is broad and flexible with no defined rules. We think we will know it when we see it, to paraphrase an expression. With that in mind, a more serious still life work goes beyond a random assemblage of objects. It is a directed purposeful creation that conveys messages through a selection of objects imbued with symbolism from custom or religious association. Looking at the still life photography of Claire Rosen, Yelena Strokin, Robert Langham III, and Julia McLaurin in the exhibition "Fabled Flora," we examine four different approaches to this art genre that literally span centuries of creative effort.

Many descriptive terms are used for the still life genre. To appreciate a still life image carefully crafted and any instilled message, we have to appreciate the seriousness of the term "still life" itself. In French, "*nature morte*," and in Dutch, "*stillevan*," both reference dead nature. The Latin term "*vanitas*," literally vanity, references the transience of life and the conceit of earthly physical possessions and pleasures. "*Memento Mori*," also Latin, is the sobering expression—remember that you must die. These are all branches of a common root for "still life" that, by genre alone, asks that we appreciate and take life seriously: what we do with, in and during our lifetime.

A fable is a fictitious story styled to teach a moral lesson as a visual vehicle for teaching and preaching. Extending beyond the term "still life," we acknowledge that objects, whether man-made or natural, have meaning. Composition is a key element in the dialogue for the image. Despite weighty and intellectual description, a still life does allow us to enjoy life of the moment and the modest pleasure in the beauty of objects. The arrangement by the artist, and the framing within the image, is key to how a fable is told. That meaning extends beyond a literal explanation of what the objects may appear to reference. On her white, minimalist compositions, Yelena Strokin writes that "The color white projects purity, cleanliness, and neutrality...White is a traditional color worn by brides in the western world and some other countries, but in China and parts of Africa, white is the color of mourning. The egg is a symbol of the birth, but a white skull represents death."

Claire Rosen creates a classic feeling still life that is easily and comfortably approachable, but still complex in its message. Given objects have an importance beyond their literal existence in a parable. The arrangement of the objects creates a conversation within the image. Claire Rosen commented: "These still life images aim not to grab your attention, but hold your attention, to reflect the full scope of human experience, the beauty and the darkness. The viewer is invited to contemplate the complexity of life rather than escape from it."

In Robert Langham III's "Triple Magnolias" and Julia McLaurin's "The Silver Lining is Duct Tape" mixed-media installation, the artists confront us with still life arrangement and style very different from Rosen and Strokin. The still life "Triple Magnolias" emerges from a fanciful series Langham calls "Magic and Logic" that is meant to visually and mentally challenge the observer. Langham commented: "Almost all of Magic & Logic are images of the imagination. You actually can't see them, only visualize them, until the negative comes out of the fixer. No painter would ever imagine them. They require a camera to be seen." Everything about Julia McLaurin's work sheds tradition and traditional expectation. McLaurin's image, part of her "American Still Life" series, brings us a very modern composition imbuing typically mundane objects with the high symbolism of the traditional still life genre, yet in a playful manner. While Rosen and Strokin study the symbolism in traditional objects, Langham and McLaurin remove our preconceived visual references and reimagine them.

Photography, like painting, used the still life as an exercise for demonstrating a skillful reproduction of a staged scene. As craftsmanship progressed, some artists transitioned to the incorporation of mystery, message and symbolism. "Fabled Flora" frames four different fanciful approaches to still life composition that shift from traditional to contemporary, with imbedded meaning. The visual image becomes a mental conversation to remind us of our mortality, the transience of life, the conceit of excess, metamorphosis and transformation. Objects, like flora, skulls, insects, reptiles, fruit, animals, and man-made containers, speak. The objects befit words and meaning. In addition to symbolism, there is composition. As purposefully and thoughtfully arranged, the visual becomes a story, without words. The quality of the image may rest on how clear the visual statement is, or whether it is a vague opaque jumble of unrelated objects. Despite the wide variety of visual techniques used, the different lighting, the different staging, arrangement and presentation, these artists have created their own *visual* style of telling a fable. Appreciating visual clues and symbolism, we separate a merely decorative arrangement (created only for visual enjoyment), from serious work with a thoughtful underlying message to be sought out, colored by our own tradition, culture and religion that has stained them with significance. In "Fabled Flora", each of these artists have staged works that will reward us with a fable worth seeing.

CLAIRE
ROSEN

After Severin Roesen No. 0305

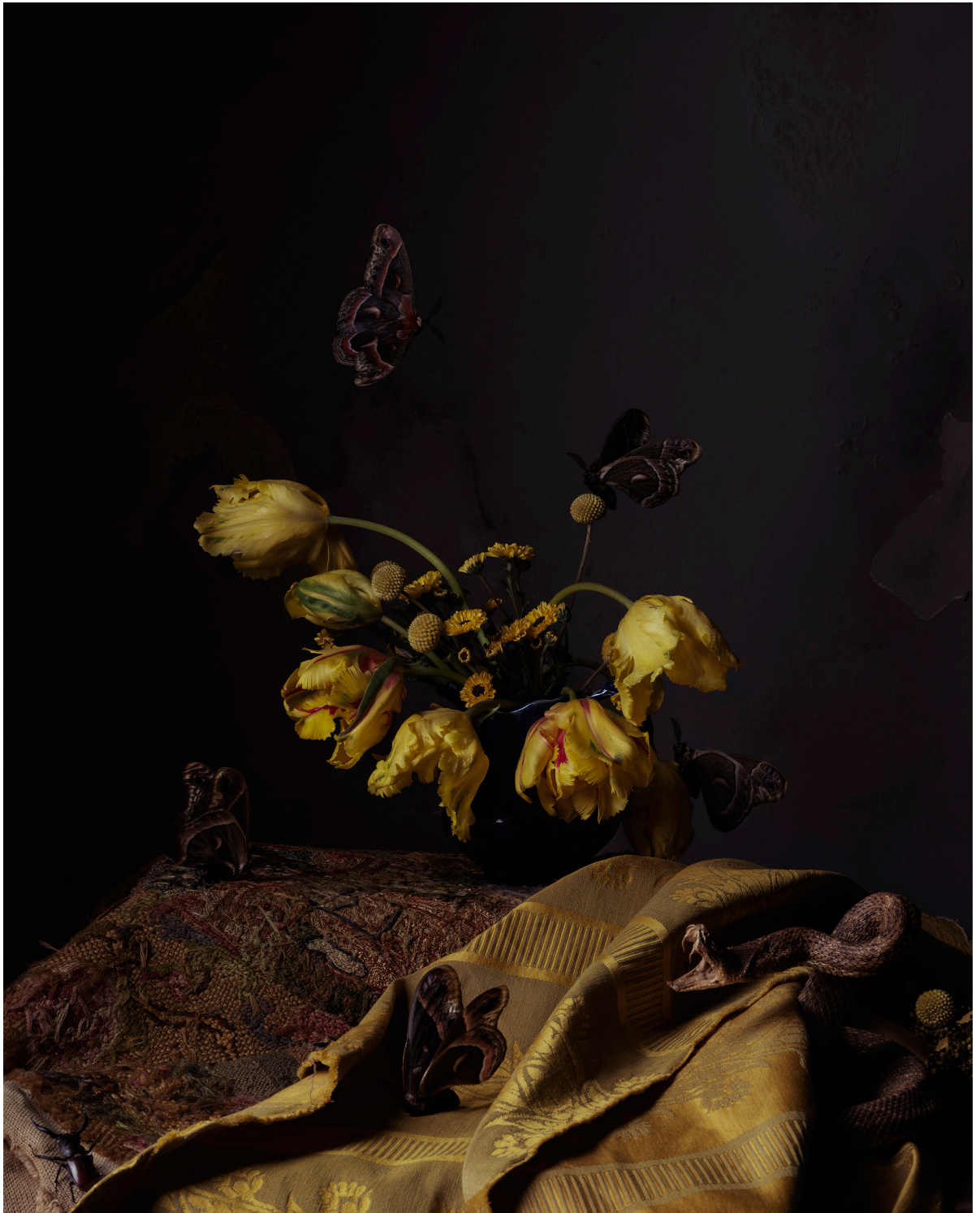
Archival pigment print
24 x 18" • Edition of 10
40 x 30" • Edition of 7
60 x 45" • Edition of 3





Floral Still Life No. 1114

Archival pigment print
24 x 18" • Edition of 10
40 x 30" • Edition of 7
60 x 45" • Edition of 3



Rattlesnake and Tulips
Archival pigment print
24 x 18" • Edition of 10
40 x 30" • Edition of 7
60 x 45" • Edition of 3



Calf at Window

Archival pigment print
18 x 24" • Edition of 10
30 x 40" • Edition of 7
45 x 60" • Edition of 3



Table No. 1534

Archival pigment print
18 x 24" • Edition of 10
30 x 40" • Edition of 7
45 x 60" • Edition of 3

YELENA
STROKIN

Off White 7

Archival pigment print
19 x 13" • Edition of 19
22 x 17" • Edition of 24
30 x 24" • Edition of 19





Off White 6

Archival pigment print
19 x 13" • Edition of 19
22 x 17" • Edition of 24
30 x 24" • Edition of 19



Off White 16

Archival pigment print
19 x 13" • Edition of 19
22 x 17" • Edition of 24
30 x 24" • Edition of 19



Off White 8

Archival pigment print
19 x 13" • Edition of 19
22 x 17" • Edition of 24
30 x 24" • Edition of 19



Off White 10

Archival pigment print
19 x 13" • Edition of 19
22 x 17" • Edition of 24
30 x 24" • Edition of 19

ROBERT
LANGHAM

Triple Magnolia

Silver gelatin print
10 x 8" • Edition of 20
24 x 20" • Edition of 20





Stacked Dogwoods

Silver gelatin print
10 x 8" • Edition of 20
24 x 20" • Edition of 20



Untitled Sunflower

Silver gelatin print
10 x 8" • Edition of 20
24 x 20" • Edition of 20

JULIA
MCLAURIN

The Silver Lining is Duct Tape

Archival pigment print
22 x 17" • Edition of 10



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

CLAIRE ROSEN is an award-winning artist whose elaborate constructions often feature anthropomorphic animals, archetypal heroines, or symbolic still-lives evoking the aesthetics of classical painting influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites and referencing the Victorian Era. The transportive images captivate with a fascination of the natural world and ideals of beauty.

Rosen has twice earned a place on Forbes "30 under 30" list for Art & Design and her work has received recognition from Aesthetica Art Prize, Communication Arts, IPA, Graphis, PDN, Photo Annual, People's Choice Photoville Fence, Photolucida Critical Mass, Prix de la Photographie and Sony World Awards. Her work has been featured in Complex Art+Design, Creative Quarterly Journal, Der Greif, Direct Art, Faded + Blurred, Fast & Co, featureShoot, The Guardian UK Observer, Hi Fructose Magazine, Juxtapoz Magazine, NPR Weekend Edition, National Geographic Proof, PDN, Refinery29, Slate Magazine, The Washington Post Insights, and The World Photography Organization.

Rosen's work has been exhibited worldwide, from New York to Seoul, and can be found in a number of private and public collections. Her first solo museum show was at SCAD Savannah Museum of Art in Georgia (2013) and her work has been included in juried and group shows at Annenberg Space for Photography, Aperture Gallery, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Consensus, MOPLA, PhotoPlace Gallery, with five consecutive years on the Photoville Fence in Atlanta, Boston, Brooklyn, Calgary, Houston & Santa Fe. Rosen graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2006 and Bard College at Simon's Rock in 2003.

Upon seeing YELENA STROKIN'S images for the first time, the viewer can't help but be captured by their elegant, Old World beauty. The glowing, Caravaggioesque light that defines her work imparts a jewel-like quality to glass and fruits. Bold colors of produce, flowers, butterflies and European antiques set against a rich background are arranged in carefully crafted compositions that recall the old Masters of the Flemish style of painting from the 17th century. Vegetables seen through Yelena's lens, are luxurious pieces of sculpture. Sumptuous textures, whether the shimmer of fine fabric, the luminosity of fine porcelain and old silver or the earthiness of rough wood add strength and richness to her images.

Yelena was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, has traveled extensively throughout Europe and Asia and now makes her home in Bucks County Pennsylvania. She is a trained chef and has formally studied design and photography. Her love of classical, European art and antiques, her appreciation of the natural beauty of objects from the fields and woods near her home as well as country breads, fruits and vegetables from her kitchen and garden have all found expression and harmonious life in her artwork.

Whether formal and delicate or simple and rustic, Yelena's exquisitely crafted work possesses a timeless quality that transcends culture and continents to add graciousness and beauty to any setting.

Her work is published in many American as well as in European magazines (Burda Food: Sweet Dreams (Germany), Magazine Freundin: Donna (Germany), Cigar Aficionado (US), GENTE (Italy), Bucks Life (US), Home & Table (US) and more). Yelena's work has been exhibited in local and metropolitan galleries.

ROBERT LANGHAM lives in Tyler, Texas, in the same brick-street neighborhood where he was raised. Until recently, he worked in the same darkroom at The Tyler Junior College where he has taught for 40 years. As an assistant at the Ansel Adams studios in Yosemite, Langham honed his skill at interpreting landscape imagery as expressed in his "Shiprock, New Mexico" images. Though he teaches digital photography and the use of photoshop, which he uses for commercial work, his personal artwork is done on film, using large format cameras and a traditional "wet" darkroom.

Langham is also very much a naturalist and environmentalist. His hometown, Tyler, is in the Blackfork Creek watershed, high in the Neches River drainage. His "Blackfork Bestiary" series (a bestiary is an ancient scientific catalog of animals) is a portfolio of live animals and insects from this Blackfork Creek ecosystem, are photographed in a very non-traditional manner and composition. All these critters (from black-widow spiders and poisonous snakes to possums and frogs) are then safely released back into nature. Nor is Langham afraid to experiment with staging non-traditional photographic subjects. In his "still-life" work, "Magic and Logic," he creates what he refers to as a "kinetic still life." He reinterprets what we think of as a traditional still life work with movement and fiction done in camera without post-processing trickery. "Magic & Logic" reflects how he worships the mystery of dreams and ideas that find their way into a tangible creation. His work is in several museums, including The Harry Ransom Center, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and The Museum of Southeast Texas at Beaumont.

JULIA MCLAURIN was born in 1981 to Polish immigrant parents. From a young age, McLaurin grew up in Houston, Texas. Her upbringing straddled a life in post-war communist Europe and a growing up in America, which influenced her art later in life. At home, her parents spoke Polish, so she became bilingual and multi-cultural. Her summer vacations were uniquely spent in summer camps in both pre and post Communist Poland, as well as time in Warsaw. Growing up she rode, trained and competed in show horses and jumpers, both in the U.S. and Europe. All the while, she was also challenged by family entrenched in old-world religious beliefs that contrasted with a greater freedom of thought in America. The contrast of life in Pre and Post Communist Poland, and life in the United States, early on, molded a perception of government and leadership. Art was fully part of her family life. Both grandmothers were architects in Europe, and her mother, who was also trained in architecture in the U.S., nurtured her life long study of print-making and sculpture, primarily at the Glassell School of Art in Houston. Her father practiced medicine. McLaurin's path into photography was indirect. Despite obtaining an undergraduate and Masters in Psychology and Biology, McLaurin found herself drawn back to art and visual expression. In 2010 she opened the Srenka ("Mermaid" in Polish, and the symbol for Warsaw) Photography Studio with both of her sisters. McLaurin began experimenting with photomontage, enhanced by her early training in 4-color printing processes. Today, she is a full-time artist and photographer. McLaurin, her husband and children still call Houston home.

FOTO RELEVANCE

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum quality contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. The gallery has mounted monographic exhibitions as well as group shows to investigate current trends and themes in contemporary art, showcasing a broad range of both darkroom and digital photographic techniques. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District of Houston, Texas.



FOTO RELEVANCE

4411 Montrose Blvd.
Suite C
Houston, TX 77006
713.505.1499
FotoRelevance.com