

[Please try to use the same san-serif font that was used in the 2001 catalogue. But don't use a scan of that catalogue text; this is slightly altered. Center the three paragraphs and the lower explanatory line both vertically and horizontally. The first sentence is not bold, but is a larger font and in italics. The line at bottom is in a smaller serif font.]

It is only initially that the subject of Carmela Kolman's new paintings appears to be pears. They are the sole object she depicts, and as fruit are related to the abundant conglomerations of produce, flowers, fowl, and tabletop symbols of Baroque still life painting. But her arrays of pears in a single layer across the pictorial field, in loose scatters verging on a modernist grid, set aside the domestic locale and faux candidness of the traditional motif. Kolman's reductive compositions give us generic pears in slightly blurred contours and deep saturated colors and juxtapose them to almost equally prominent darkly hued shapes between their masses.

Thus, in Kolman's hands the substantial shadows cast by her nominal subject are fully integrated into the picture. The emotionally heightened effect can be appreciated both as dramatic abstraction and dramatized metaphor. The shape of the pears is roughly akin to that of humans' silhouettes. They are not upright but prone, suggesting bodies at rest, as if in darkened bedrooms variously illuminated between curtain openings by high noon, sunset, or moonlight.

In this meditation on stilled life, the strong presence of the shadows effectively updates the genre's traditional *memento mori* allusions to mortality – an hourglass trickling sand from potential to past, a just extinguished candle emitting a smoky plume, and the foreboding skeletal skull. In Kolman's intense focus on pears, her subject becomes the shifting tandem between this succulent sign of life and its dark side. Her images are both visually compelling and even more rare, emotionally complex.

Statement for the exhibition catalogue, *Carmela Kolman, Paintings*,
Prince Street Gallery, March 2001 by Suzaan Boettger

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Vitality Seized

Suzaan Boettger

Clusters of softly glistening grapes, pears shimmering in darkened atmospheres, glowing peach spheres and gleaming apples – fruits of knowledge and seduction – were the radiances that Carmela Kolman brought forth during the mid-period of her professional career. With objects isolated against fields in muted hues, these compositions offered minimalist evocations of the traditional genre she excelled at, still life. When shown after the Great Recession following the 2007 market crash, the provocative juxtapositions of sensuality and restraint spoke to conflicted desires in a period of political flux and fiscal instabilities. As the economy recovered, her small, richly-hued orbs splayed across white planes played with oscillating associations of juicy pieces of fruit and Tutti-Frutti candies. But twinned to the gum drops' brightness were shadows.

Carmela was a well-respected New York painter (RISD BFA; Yale MFA) who regularly exhibited in solo and group shows in the trendiest precincts of Manhattan art galleries and elsewhere. She actively participated in the artists' group devoted to still life painting, Zeuxis, with whom she showed her work throughout the United States. As did Italian modernist still life painter Giorgio Morandi in his judicious arrangements of faintly hued vessels, her paintings demonstrate her fine attention to spatial juxtapositions for dynamic adjacent shapes and the potency of negative spaces. Rather than the customary tabletop heterogeneity, Carmela signaled plenitude by the richness of individual objects.

Having focused for a decade on fruit, Carmela turned her attention to serpentine strings of luminous beads and close-ups of rose blossoms loosely brushed. Flowers, associated in historical visual culture with nature and transient beauty, have always been signs for the female. Carmela's extreme closeups of bouquets present them in a scale so exaggerated that they call up – and invite – burying one's face in petals and inhaling the aroma. The jewelry continued the visual duality of vivid spheres loosely arranged and projecting from flattened grounds and made more explicit the feminine allure of the luscious globules. Both subjects summon sensations of abundance, fertility, and glamour.

A phase of her compositions' compressed recession and expansive space abstract the tabletop arrangements into modernist fields dotted with color. The orbs of fruit and circles of beads are often seen against ambiguous grounds that are neither table nor wall – in effect, presenting a modernist flattening of space against which they visually project. Often she subverted the traditional frontal perspective onto tabletop arrangements – the cornerstone of traditional still

life – by viewing her objects from immediately above. The hovering aerial viewpoint generates an intimate proximity to the arrays.

Sometimes, these grounds are in a subtly greyed or toned hue, both spatially and emotionally recessive. More frequently, contradicting the vivacity of individual objects modeled in illusionistic volumes, are cast shadows so prominently shaped and strongly colored that their presence becomes a crucial compositional element and determinant of images' affect. So the mood becomes deliberate vivaciousness against a ground of melancholy.

Carmela's pictures evoke a fervent *joi de vivre*, the desire to seize light – to literally “take pleasure” from the act of grasping and portraying its illumination of beautiful natural objects and organic forms. Of course these were in part responses to her delayed acquisition of clear sight, albeit in only one eye, at 23. And the shadows conjure her congenital, always looming, Marfan syndrome. Her passion for pictorial brightness to forestall the fall of darkness displays her energy, fortitude, and hope. Together these elements made her, and her paintings, admirable and memorable. Carmela's images are vital *because* she knew darkness, and her striking fusions arouse attention, reflection, and gratitude for their encompassing beauty.

Suzaan Boettger, an art historian, critic, author and lecturer in New York City, and Carmela first met when Dr. Boettger selected Carmela's work for inclusion in the exhibition she guest curated for the Trabia Gallery, SoHo, on view in February 1990, “Radiant Fruit: Iconic Still Life.”