

Emily Steinberg, *Easton Irregular Art Profile*, June 2012

”What you see is what you get.”

“Cornices and Teacups,” Emily Steinberg’s most recent show at Schmidtberger Fine Art in Frenchtown, closed May 31. Emily works in an Expressionist-Realist style, combining an innate awkwardness with superior painting and drawing technique. She approaches her subjects--teacups, old buildings, matzo cracker boxes, asparagus, the human figure--with equanimity and imbues them with the unique, wobbly energy that emanates from her hand. If you funneled the strange vitality of Charles Burchfield through the clear structure of Edward Hopper, you would get Emily Steinberg’s emotional portraits of everyday subjects. In the cornices paintings, lively, sensitive brushstrokes create both architectural details and hollow sky. With the teacups, bold brushstrokes depict the decorative pattern as well as the form, distinguishing the interior and exterior surfaces. Smooth areas of flat color calm the eye and conjure the feeling of cool porcelain against your cheek. When I met Emily in her studio in Philadelphia, I was shocked to see the actual teacups she used: they were like movie stars at the airport--tired, annoyed, tightlipped and grim. How did she discover and express so much drama in china? Each cup has its own personality, and her skill at creating characters suggests a story. The cups remind her of her mom who “liked her cup of tea” and evoke imaginary women dressed plain to fancy.

Emily has taught studio art and lectured on art history in the Philadelphia area since the early ‘90s; currently, she teaches painting at Penn State Abington. She received her BFA in 1987 and MFA in 1992 from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1987, she studied at the Penn-in-Florence program in Florence, Italy, and in 1989 and 2005 she was a resident at Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont. After a tough period of being unable to paint, she wrote *Graphic Therapy*, a graphic memoir that was serialized in *SMITH Magazine* (2008-2009). It’s a rant on searching for love and a reason to make art after finishing her education and having to work at low-paying, arts-related jobs. Working on the book honed her drawing skills and gave free reign to her humor while she wished and willed her fortune to change. During 2010, she read and discussed her book at (I list only a few venues): PSU Abington; “*Chicks & Comics*” at Mary Jacobs Library in Rock Hill, New Jersey; and First Person Arts Salon Series and The Print Center in Philadelphia. Also, she wrote “Blogging Towards Oblivion” for *The Moment* (HarperCollins 2012). Producing and marketing her book inspired Emily to return to painting and exhibiting her work. Recently, Emily showed in “Network” at Westbeth Gallery in New York City, displaying a larger version of the teacups series, using scale to impact style.

When describing her painting style Emily remarks, “What you see is what you get,” I would add that she knows when to paint colorful, complicated passages and when to leave well enough alone. She creates a model for the human emotions of attachment and detachment. To return to those teacups: everyday objects are transformed into emotional, sentient beings, and as a group of 16, they represent a cross section of society. Emily is the painter’s version of Honoré de Balzac, author of *The Human Comedy*. Balzac also measured description, creating comic, tragic characters. A Realist, he saw the world ruin the weak and champion the strong and his sarcastic humor eases the pain of human failure. Juxtaposing gnarly patches of paint with smooth ones, Emily creates independent, talkative, female characters in all their contradictions. Witty and candid, they are more than happy to reveal their frailties, struggles and triumphs.

—Elizabeth Johnson