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Christopher Stott



Christopher Stott, *Difference of Opinion*, 2010
Courtesy Elliot Fouts Gallery
Sacramento, California

Christopher Stott, whose paintings were on view this summer at Elliot Fouts Gallery in Sacramento, sets up his still lifes in a clean, well-lighted place. There are artists who favor earthy textures and the massing of objects. Chardin made something sublime out of the interlocking dynamic of kitchen clutter. Stott likes to isolate a few things against a neutral white background. The illusion of space—a shelf with a wall behind it, in many cases—is maintained, but he provides little further visual information about the context. Sometimes, Stott’s plain-spoken realism seems rudimentary, as in *Green Grapes and Three Bottles* (all works 2010), where the objects are starkly lined up, united mostly by sharp highlights on pellucid fruit and dark glass. In *Two Tricycles*, the objects tend to float, like slices of pie in one of Wayne Thiebaud’s Pop still lifes, although Stott’s figure and ground don’t engage each other as

boisterously as Thiebaud’s, who uses paint like cake icing. In his more reductive compositions, the intrinsic interest of the subject plays a significant role. *Three Pomegranates* is simple in design, but the leathery, ruby-dark skin of the fruit contrasts appealingly with the brushy white backdrop, nuanced with grey. The old-fashioned alarm clocks of *10:00, 11:00, 12:00* have considerable personality.

But for his best still lifes, Stott selects objects that suggest they have stories to tell. No explicit narrative is evoked, yet they have the sheen of experience about them. The simplest composition of this type is *Blue, Red, Green*, which depicts colored pencils in glass tumblers, their transparency refreshingly crisp. In *Antique Books and Bartlett Pear*, the glare on the green skin of the fruit is

nicely balanced by velvety grey shadows along the edges of the books. With their spines turned away from us, for the most part, the books are anonymous, but their solidity and texture lend gravitas to the images. *Books, Paper, Pencil and Typewriter* is a handsome invitation to the writer's life. The haphazard pile of books, with some volumes open and others leaning precariously, brings a sense of spontaneity, that intuitive play of ideas that is crucial to any creative discipline. Objects that carry some sort of backstory lure Stott out of his overly tidy realism. The dramatic personae in *Six Pieces of Luggage* certainly have history, visible in their battered edges and scuffs. The color interruptions—one green suitcase, another striped one in yellowish brown—enliven a chorus line of basic black. When Stott opens up the space to hint at a room, as in *Difference of Opinion*, he gets good results. A clean-lined black chair with a pile of eighteen books stands at an angle to a grey chair, which holds a single open volume: a collector or researcher cohabiting with someone who reads casually, for pleasure, perhaps. The light comes from the side; a window may be the source. Here, a still life seems to be inching its way toward being an interior. The exhibition was on view June 5–July 2, 2010, at Elliott Fouts Gallery, 4749 J Street, Sacramento, California 95819. Telephone (916) 736-1429. On the web at www.efgallery.com

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