



FIGURE 9-13  
JOHN LEES  
*Bog*, 1986  
Ink, watercolor, pencil,  
and mixed media/paper,  
22½ × 37½"

landscape intimate in its detail, yet one that threatens to ensnare with twigs and smother with demonic clouds.

The image in the Lees drawing, on the other hand, seems more remote. The impenetrable mass of nondescript bushes coalesces into a shape that hovers quietly in the middle of the page. Here is nature at its wildest, with forms that are inexplicable to human understanding.

The drawing by Sean Gallagher (Fig. 9-14) proposes that the relationship between humanity and nature is akin to an uneasy truce. This is no sunlit harbor filled with gallant merchant vessels or leisure craft, but rather an industrial dockland. The great cranes we see silhouetted against a partially overcast sky seem to have fallen into disuse, so the regret we feel at seeing the natural shoreline disturbed by industrial structures is compounded by frustration at the wastefulness of modern commerce. The agitated surface of the water, which grows visually "louder" in the foreground, may effectively stir in us the sublime terror of the unknown. And, by drawing our attention to the receding plane of water, the artist reminds us of the immensity and long duration of nature when compared to the puny strivings of humankind.

The romantic conception of nature as being in a constant state of flux finds its urban counterpart in Figure 9-15. Here, commuters careen over precipitous Bay Area streets under a network of cables transporting invisible electrical impulses. The buildings, like the stunted trees, seem temporary in this cityscape, where yearnings for place and permanence are secondary to the imperatives of rapid transit and telecommunication.

### STILL LIFE

Still life became a subject in its own right in the Low Countries at about the same time as the appearance of landscape. The still-life genre, more than landscape or



FIGURE 9-14  
SEAN P. GALLAGHER  
*Renewed Presence*  
Pencil on paper, 22 × 14"

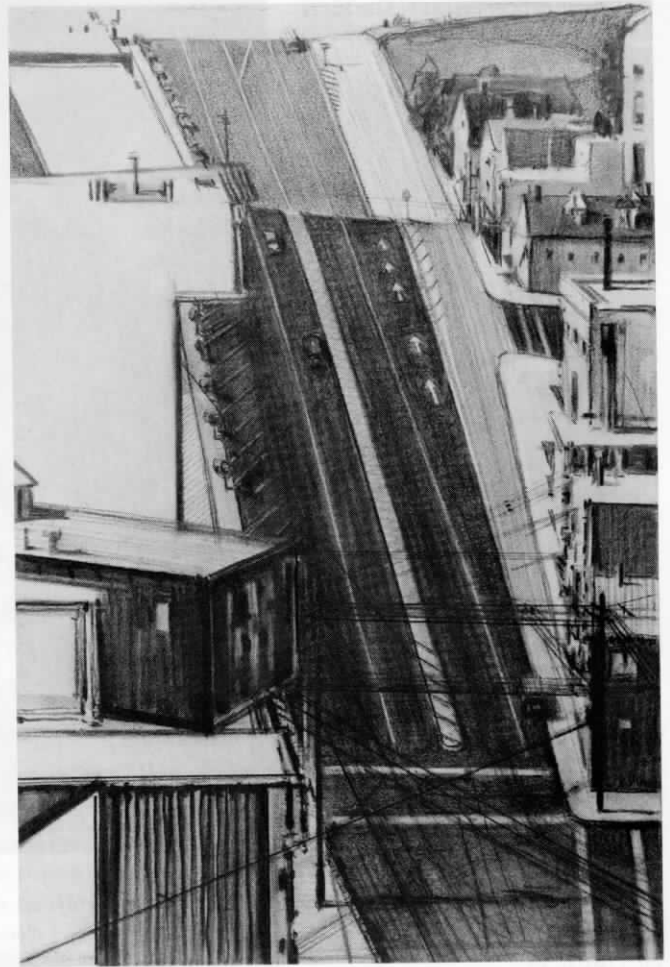


FIGURE 9-15  
WAYNE THIEBAUD  
*Down 18th Street (Potrero Hill), 1974*  
Charcoal on paper, 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"  
Art © Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York; Photo courtesy of the Allan Stone  
Gallery, New York; Photo: Ivan Dalla Tana

the figure, retained a strong allegorical content long after it was removed from the context of religious narrative. Detailed depictions of flowers and insects (Fig. 9-16) were symbolic of the variety and also the impermanence of Creation. Vast piles of food—fruits, vegetables, dead poultry, game, fish, and raw flesh of all kinds—were not only evidence of the wealth and abundance of the bourgeois household but also a resigned recognition of the transience of all life. The moralistic theme of the temporality of all material things finds its culmination in the *Vanitas* still life (Fig. 9-17). (The Latin word *vanitas* literally means “emptiness,” but in Medieval times it became associated with the folly of empty pride.)

The *vanitas* theme is one that has survived to this day in still life. In the drawing by William Wiley (Fig. 9-18), the objects on the left-hand side are the memento mori so commonly found in Dutch *vanitas* paintings: The apple is a symbol of the mortal result of Original Sin; the dice and chess piece are symbolic of life as a game of chance; the steaming beaker suggests the futile search for the elixir of life; the jewels are symbols of earthly pride; and the knife, skull, and candle all belong to the iconography of human mortality. A framed mirror near the center of the drawing bears the fleeting inscription “What is

FIGURE 9-16  
AMBROSIUS BOSSCHAERT, The Elder  
*Large Bouquet in a Gilt-Mounted  
Wan-Li Vase*  
Oil on panel, 31½ × 21½"



FIGURE 9-17  
HERMAN STEENWIJCK  
*Vanitas Painting, c. 1640*  
Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden,  
The Netherlands



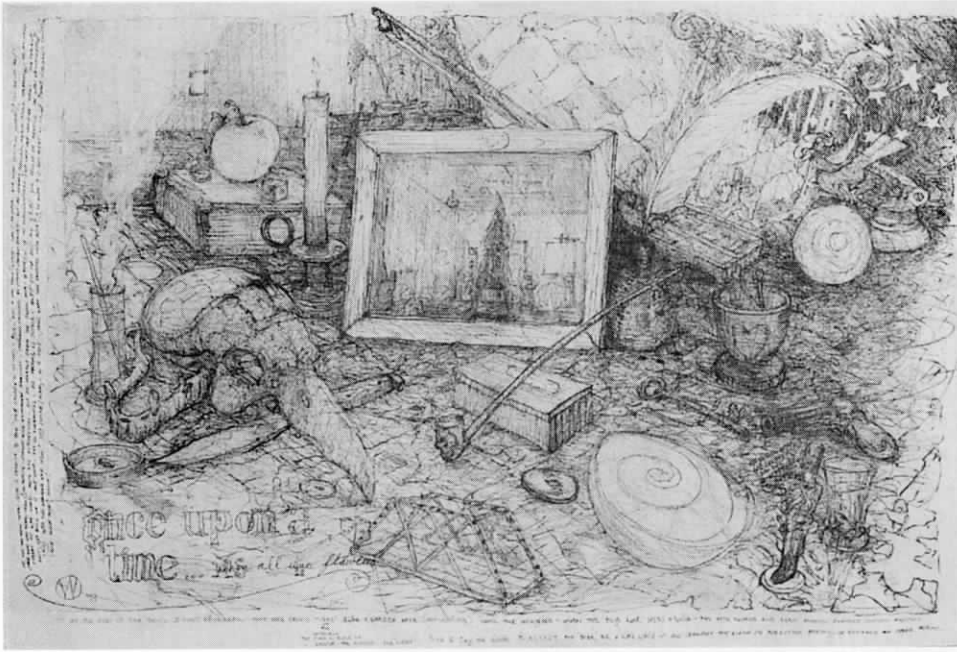


FIGURE 9-18  
WILLIAM WILEY  
G.A.D., 1980  
35½ × 53½"

not a bridge to something else?"—a reference to the passing of all material things. Below it is a long-stemmed pipe common to both Dutch and early American still life. The pipe and tobacco box (tobacco is a New World plant) act as a bridge between the fatalistic iconography of the Old World and the iconography of death by (mis)adventure of the American frontier. The items on the right side of the drawing—the pistol, the key, the pewter cup, the quill, and the American battle standard—are objects common to the already nostalgic trompe l'oeil ("fool the eye") painting of the nineteenth century.

The painstakingly detailed pastel by Massad (Fig. 9-19) is well within the traditions of a trompe l'oeil still life. The believability of this depiction hinges on

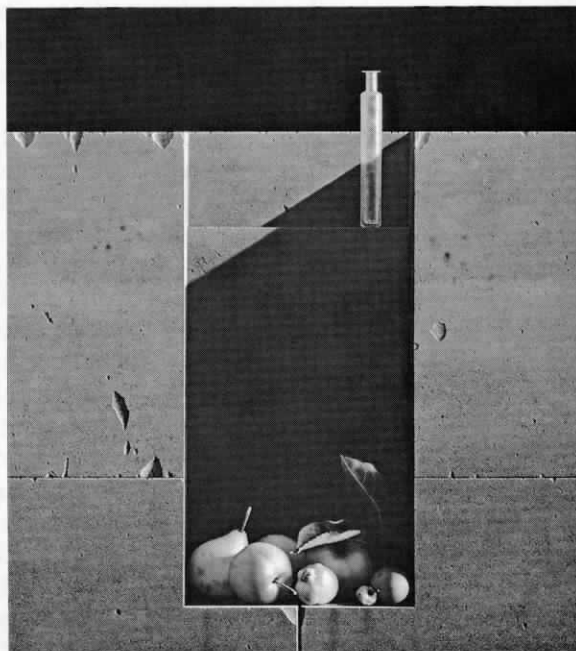


FIGURE 9-19  
G. DANIEL MASSAD  
*Columbarium*, 1998  
Pastel on paper, 24 × 21½"

FIGURE 9-20  
 TOM WESSELMAN  
*Drawing for Still Life No. 35, 1963*  
 Charcoal, 30 × 48"  
 Art © Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed  
 by VAGA, New York



the way in which the beautifully realized expanse of stone runs parallel to the picture plane, thereby eliminating any interruption between spectator space and the pictorial illusion. The artist appears to be playing with the literal meaning of still life (*Nature Morte* in French) by entombing the fruit, plucked from a living tree, in a shallow niche. His intention is underscored by the work's title, which refers to a wall pierced with niches for the commemorative storage of cremated remains. The artist's sense of irony is revealed by the explicit contrast between the rigorous structure of the architectural niche and the lively curves of the fruit. The raking light also plays a major role in the work. It bathes the luscious fruit against the unforgiving stone and reminds us of a time of day (very early morning or early evening) that is particularly fugitive.

Larger-than-life portrayals of food and other consumable items locate the Pop Art movement within the *vanitas* tradition. The Wesselmann drawing (Fig. 9-20) concentrates on the packaged nature of common consumer goods. It even goes so far as to equate the glamour and convenience associated with name-brand foods with the glamour and convenience of jet travel (another packaged experience). The only natural foodstuffs in this drawing are the two lemons, the acerbic juices of which hardly promise the immediate gratification enjoyed by the Sunshine Girl on the bread wrapper. And the cigarettes, the cola, and the highly processed foods are presented as objects of questionable desire. They are not linked overtly to the issue of life and death, as are the poultry, fish, and game of Dutch still life, but they are nonetheless icons of death, first because of their own throwaway identities and second because their consumption may prove more harmful than nourishing.

Glass drinking vessels, such as the overturned wine goblet in the Steenwijck painting or the ominous-looking liquor glass in the Wiley drawing, are common *vanitas* symbols. Among the characteristics that make them such a fitting symbol of temporality are: They can be drained of their contents; they are fragile; and they are transparent (as are ghosts), with surfaces that reflect an evanescent world in miniature. Janet Fish exploits the theme of reflection in her depiction of glassware (Fig. 9-21). The shapes of the rather sturdy and commonplace restaurant glasses are subdivided into countless shimmering, splinter-like pieces. Just as the forms of the glasses are lost in the myriad reflections, so too are the forms of the



FIGURE 9-21

JANET FISH

*Three Restaurant Glasses, 1974*  
Pastel on paper, 30¼ × 16"Collection of the Minnesota Museum of  
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by VAGA, New York

immediate environment distorted almost beyond recognition in the reflections on the glass surfaces. In the end, we get a picture of a world that is insubstantial and fragile.

### THE INTERIOR

The domestic interior has long been associated with the contemplative life. In Medieval and Renaissance painting, meticulously rendered interiors appeared in such subjects as St. Jerome in his study or in Annunciation scenes in which the Virgin is usually depicted with a book. In the Romantic era, poets and artists became increasingly preoccupied with exploring the workings of an imagination that could have free rein only in solitude. In literature, the novel delved into the private thoughts of fictitious characters who had the middle-class leisure to reflect on all the petty intrigues of domestic life. Today, the rooms to which a person can go to ruminate, reminisce, or daydream still hold a special significance.

The drawing by Lucas Samaras (Fig. 9-22) is in the tradition of the room as metaphor for the private mind. This interior is devoid of any personal domestic