

Catherine Kehoe and Susan Lichtman

# Tone Poems and Shape Notes

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Unless otherwise noted, all images by Catherine Kehoe appear courtesy of the artist and Miller Yezerski Gallery. Images by Susan Lichtman appear courtesy of the artist.



## Catherine Kehoe and Susan Lichtman: Harmonizing Essence and Inquiry

The List Gallery, Swarthmore College is pleased to present *Tone Poems and Shape Notes*, an exhibition of recent works by Catherine Kehoe and Susan Lichtman, two mid-career artists who share numerous aesthetic concerns and who are exhibiting together for the first time.

The intimate scale and illusionistic specificity of Kehoe's paintings belie their geometric complexity, nuance, and associative resonance. In her portraits, she focuses on faces and upper bodies (many of them self-portraits), almost mathematically apportioning them into unique shapes or facets. She animates her figures' silhouettes with precisely observed details and dramatic moments of color. Each brushstroke marks a shift in shape, hue, and tone, inviting us to slow the visual tempo of our attention and imagine a specific mood and presence. As we lean closer, mirroring Kehoe's own attitude of close observation, we note scraped paint surfaces, overlapping forms, and other evidence of her patient labor, analysis, and revision. Kehoe displays a gift for capturing individual likenesses, yet each portrait embodies a notion of identity that reflects the mutability of time and perception. These boldly equivocal works convey those moments of consciousness when attention drifts, identity becomes blurred, and the present becomes infused with both memory and longing.

In contrast to Kehoe's tightly focused reflections upon the interrelations of shape, perception, and identity, Lichtman creates large-scale multi-figure compositions that use diagonals, scale shifts, overlapping forms, and tonal contrasts to create the illusion of deep space. Her masterfully restrained range of tone and hue enables her to harmonize what would otherwise be a dizzying array of motifs and relationships. For example, in *Sisters*, she portrays the two figures in soft middle grey tones that blend into the jumbled living room, allowing a small white cup to unexpectedly upstage the familial scene. Like Kehoe, Lichtman does not emphasize psychological or narrative drama so much as the evocative potential and unexpected beauty to be found in the relationships between shape, line, tone, and hue. She emphasizes the way sunshine illuminates seemingly inconsequential details, casting a circle of warm color on a tabletop or leading our eye to the back door where colorful and gestural brushstrokes suggest outdoor foliage. Her subject is not just the relationship between the sisters but the holistic process of her attention as it wanders, finds moments of focus, and journeys once again in search of meaning. She invites us to enter a world where meditative and open-ended inquiry can be sustained amid the clamor of everyday life.

In varying ways, both Kehoe and Lichtman continue the tradition of Cezanne, who responded to rival aesthetic approaches to painting—one that emphasized drawing and the other color—by making both modes of representation equally important. Whereas Kehoe's works bring to mind Euan Uglow's emphasis of bold color and shape and Lichtman's compositions recall Fairfield Porter's figure groups, both artists have developed distinct visions of their own. Unabashedly elaborating tradition rather than striving to shock or entertain, they distill essential elements of painting and perception.

**Andrea Packard** List Gallery Director



# Catherine Kehoe

The more I look, the more I realize that nothing is as solid as my mind imagines. It takes a long time, weeks sometimes, for the scales to fall from my eyes so I can discern the relationships between things. Fragments of images cohere in my brain and find their way to the hand that holds the brush. This experience comes together in the abstract language of shape, color and paint.

Three genres have been central in my recent work: still-lives and self-portraits done from observation, and paintings of my Polish ancestors derived from old photographs.

Still-life painting makes it possible to compose a world that remains constant. Working from an unchanging subject, the process isolates and reveals the unstable nature of perception. Invention enters the process in the arrangement of objects and the selection of what goes into the rectangle. When I want to change the painting, I change the still life.

With my self-portrait heads I can focus on a subject that is always there. Sometimes I develop these paintings over weeks of searching

and scraping. Other times, at the end of a frustrating day, I put aside a still-life and make a quick study of my head with the remaining paint, energy, and light. I quickly forget I am looking at myself; when I see the resulting paintings, it is as if someone has captured my image without my knowledge.

In the ancestor paintings I devised a way of working from a source that did not exist in space and light in the present. I wanted to imagine the presence of people I could know only through faint photographs. I began with heads and later began relating people to each other and to space. I did not copy the photographs, but used them as a source to make paintings. In some cases I added images from different sources to give a context to the figures.

The web of sensations and relationships in our visual field is a mystery we can never fully grasp. The intersection of painting with this sensory experience yields surprises every time I go there.

—Catherine Kehoe

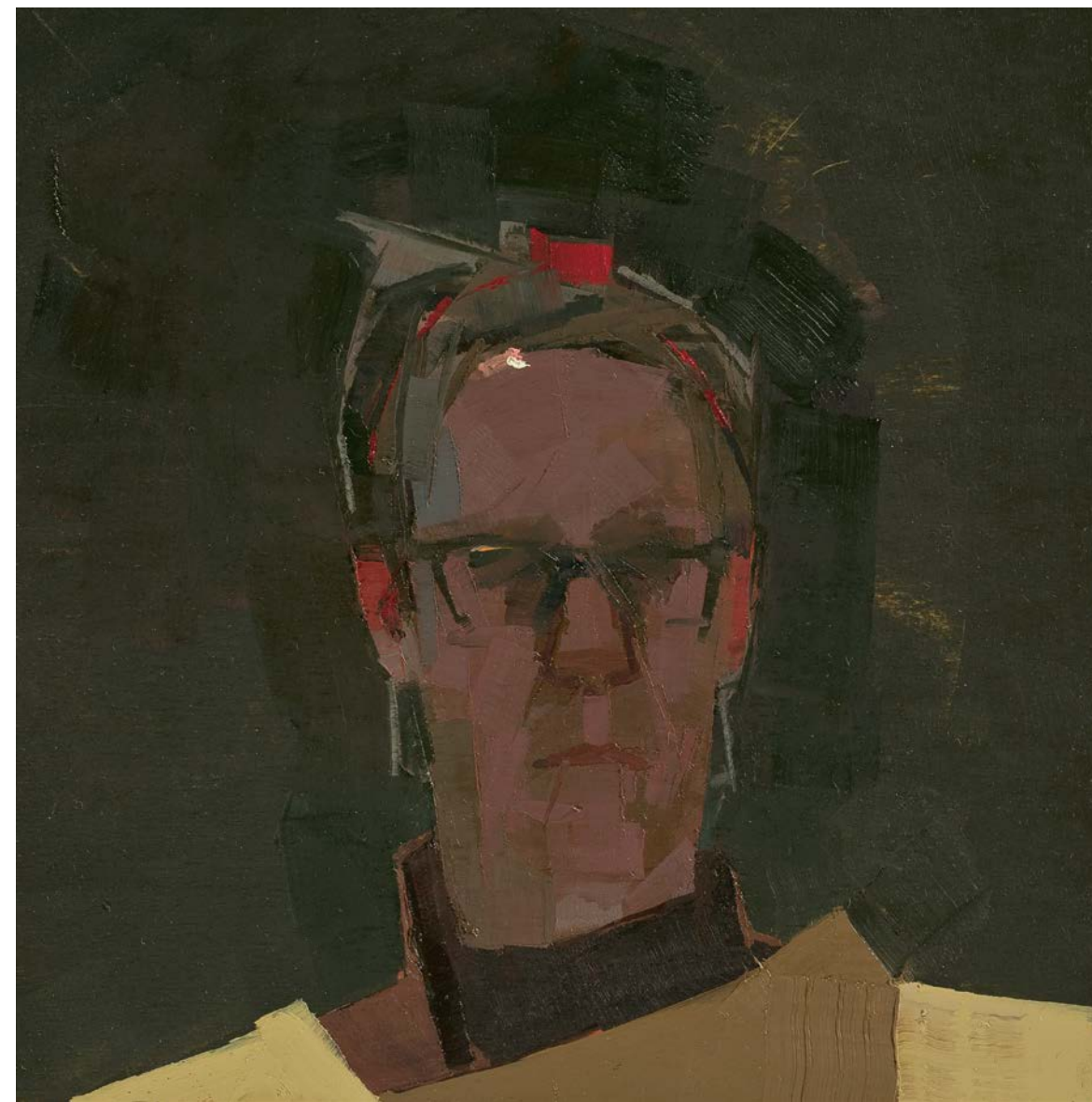
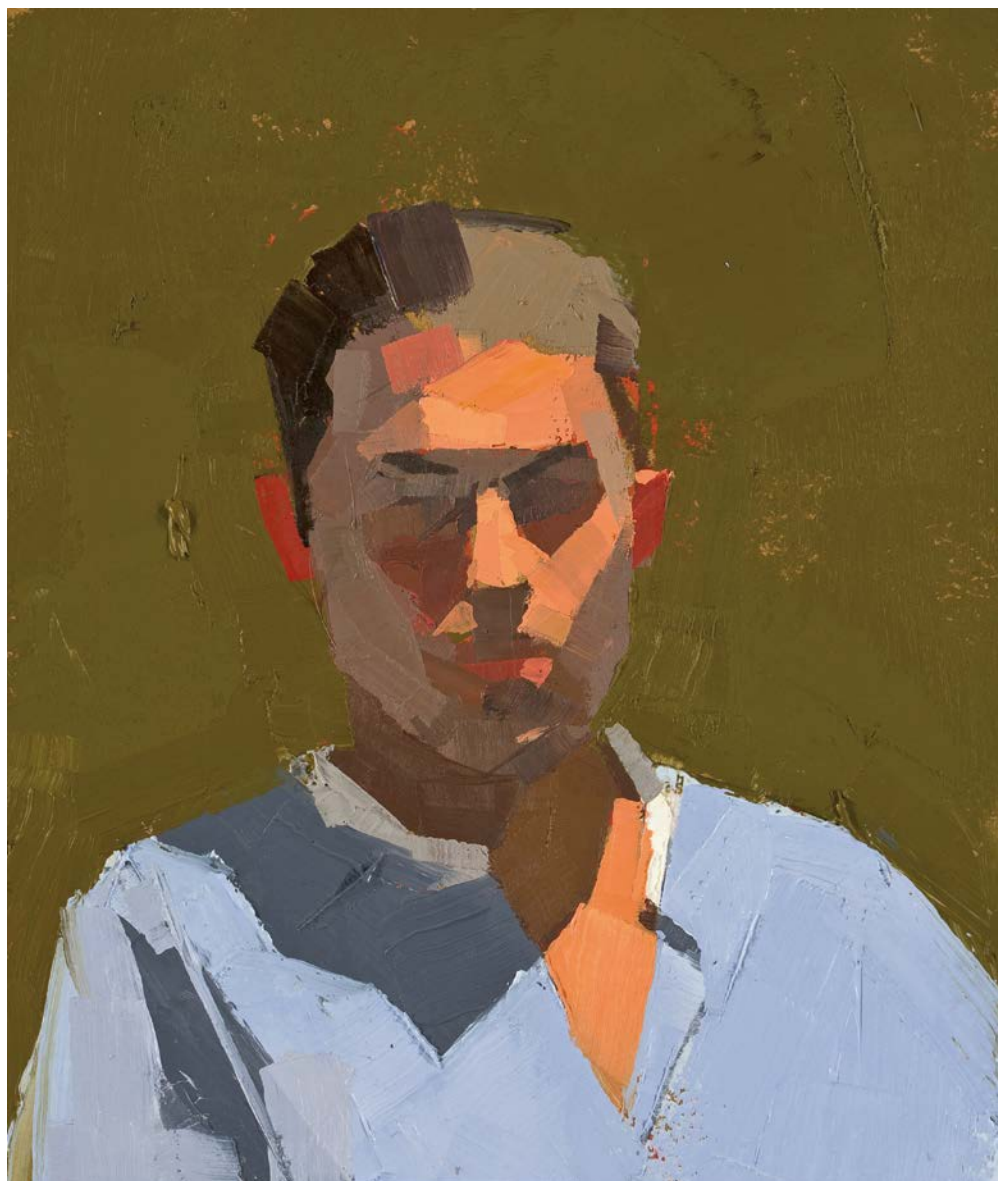


Catherine Kehoe, *Self-Portrait with Red Glasses*, 2010, oil on panel, 8 x 6 inches

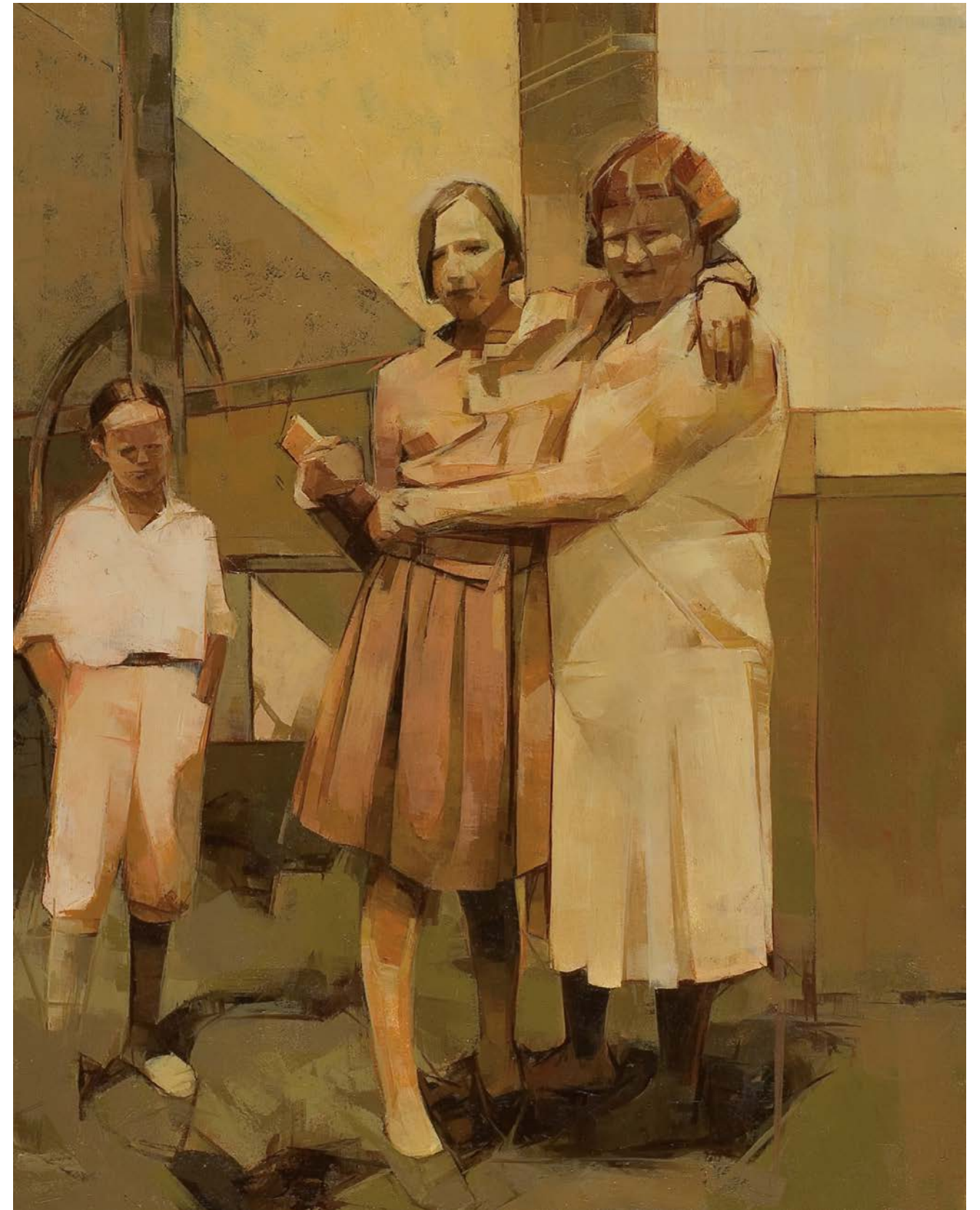


Catherine Kehoe, *Self-portrait with Red Ribbon*, 2012, oil on panel, 6 x 6 inches. Collection of Joel Katz, M.D.

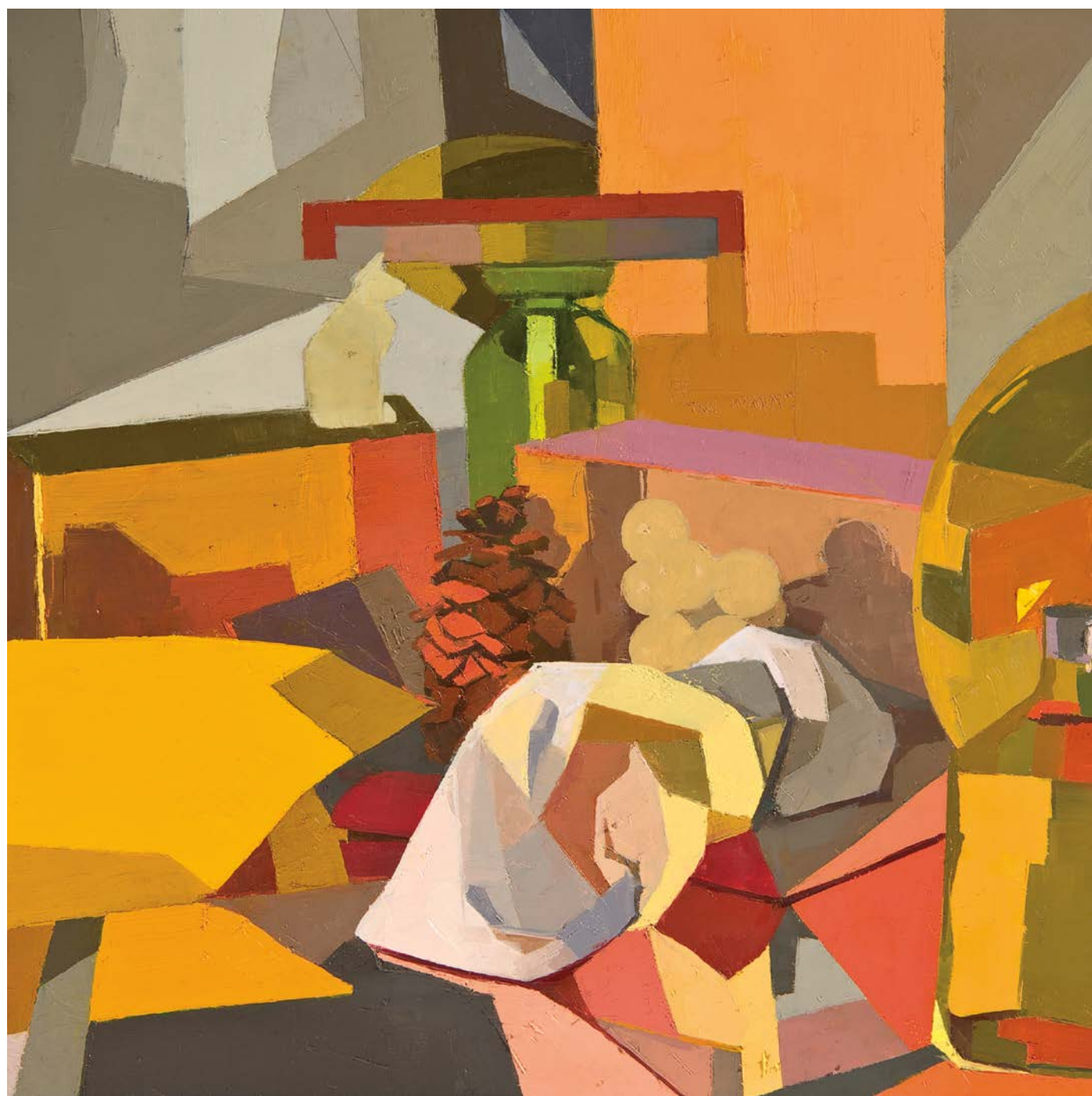




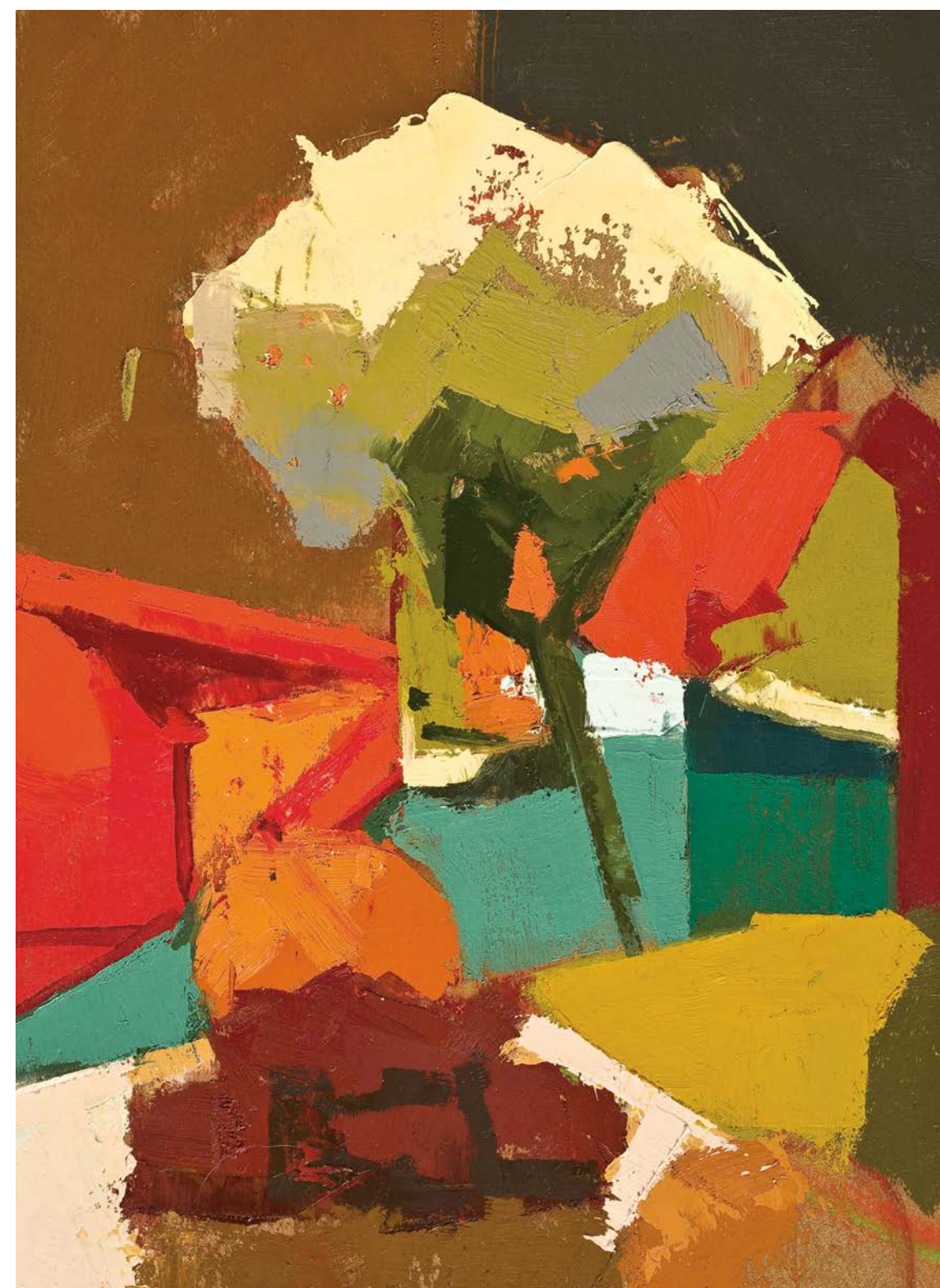














# Susan Lichtman

The interior of a house, as depicted in my paintings, is a stage inhabited by actors both observed and imagined. Family members, guests, magazine models and animals move through a deep space of open-plan living.

I prefer to compose on a large scale, in oil on canvas; and I always start with a color idea that evokes specific light. A few hues and white intermix to build a narrow tonal world, an atmospheric envelope that pulls together a complicated assortment of domestic imagery. Close value color gives a quality of remove, a degree of separation to an everyday setting.

I don't plan out my compositions beforehand. I begin by painting one thing, maybe a flower or a leg; then I parse out what could be beside, behind, and in front of that thing. I look past bouquets and out through open doors. I try to record the distances I perceive in a home interior—the vast plane of the floor and the psychological space between figures occupying the same room.

By constructing a picture piece-by-piece, it takes a while before I know what the finished whole will include. When I have found my cast of characters, when the composition is almost resolved, I paint small gouache panels from the large canvas. I might just paint a copy of the larger image; or I might use the large painting as a starting-off point for a totally new composition.

As I paint, I conjure up unplanned narratives. I realize I am revealing small things that have been on my mind: a story I heard on the news, a relationship between family members, a memory of those unsettled moments when we have just arrived home or are about to leave for elsewhere.

—Susan Lichtman



Susan Lichtman, *The Clumsy Hostess*, 2014, oil on linen, 66 x 40 inches





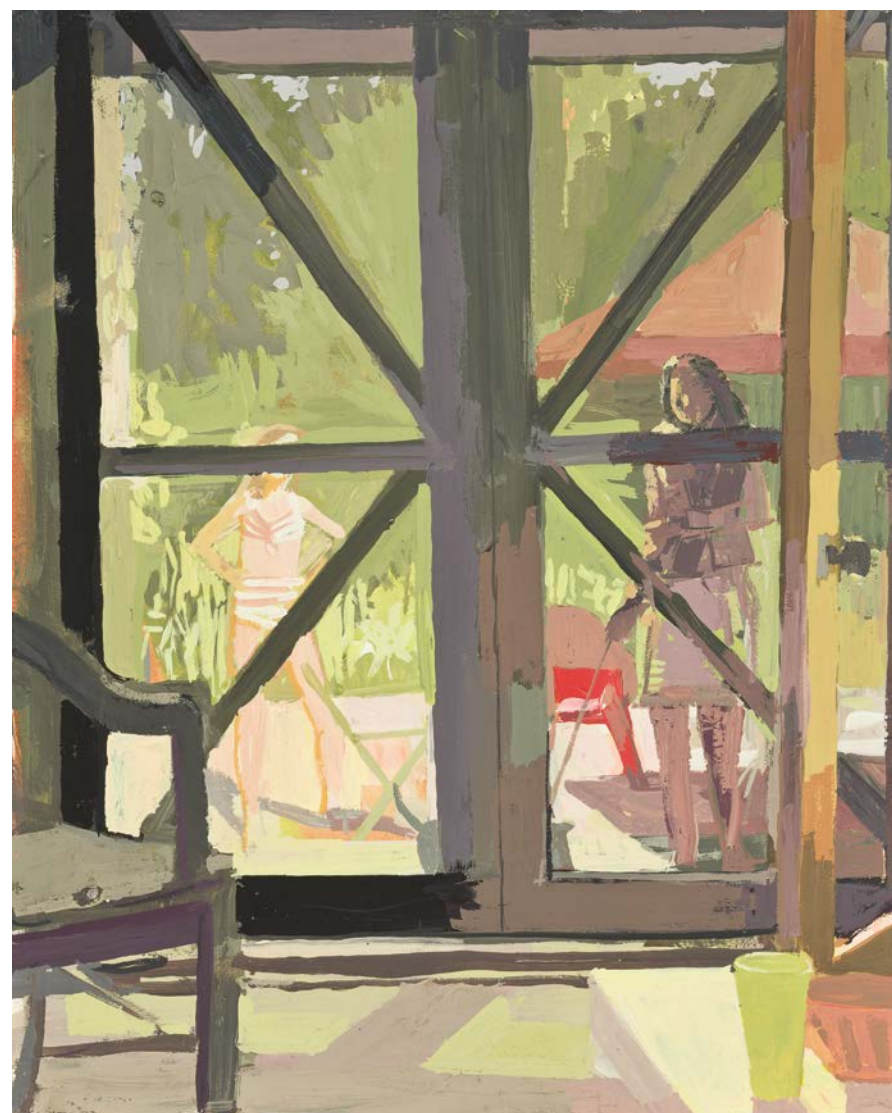














## Catherine Kehoe

Catherine Kehoe received a B.F.A. in painting from Massachusetts College of Art and Design (1989) and an M.F.A. in painting from the School of Visual Arts, Boston University (1992). Kehoe has received numerous awards including grants from the Lillian Orlofsky and William Freed Foundation, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Berkshire Taconic Artist's Resource Trust, the St. Botolph Club Foundation, and the Sam and Adele Golden Foundation for the Arts. Kehoe is represented by Miller Yezerski Gallery, Boston.

Kehoe has been a visiting artist at numerous institutions including Rhode Island College, Colby College, University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, Indiana University, Boston University School of Visual Arts, and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She teaches painting and drawing at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Kehoe has also taught painting workshops at Art New England, The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Washington Art Association, and Civita Castellana, a program of the Jerusalem Studio School.

## Susan Lichtman

Susan Lichtman received an A.B. from Brown University and an M.F.A. from Yale School of Art. She has presented solo exhibitions at Smith College, Dartmouth College, Brown University, Cornell University and the International School in Montecastello di Vibio, Italy. Her oil and gouache paintings have been exhibited regularly at Lenore Gray Gallery in Providence, Rhode Island and Gross McCleaf Gallery in Philadelphia.

An Associate Professor of Fine Arts at Brandeis University, Lichtman also lectures on her work at institutions nationwide, most recently at the University of Washington, Seattle; University of North Carolina, Asheville; University of Arkansas, Fayetteville; University of Tulsa; the Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Art Institute; and Indiana University. She has won awards from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation and the American Academy of Arts and Letters as well as grants from the Theodore and Jane Norman Fund, Brandeis University.



